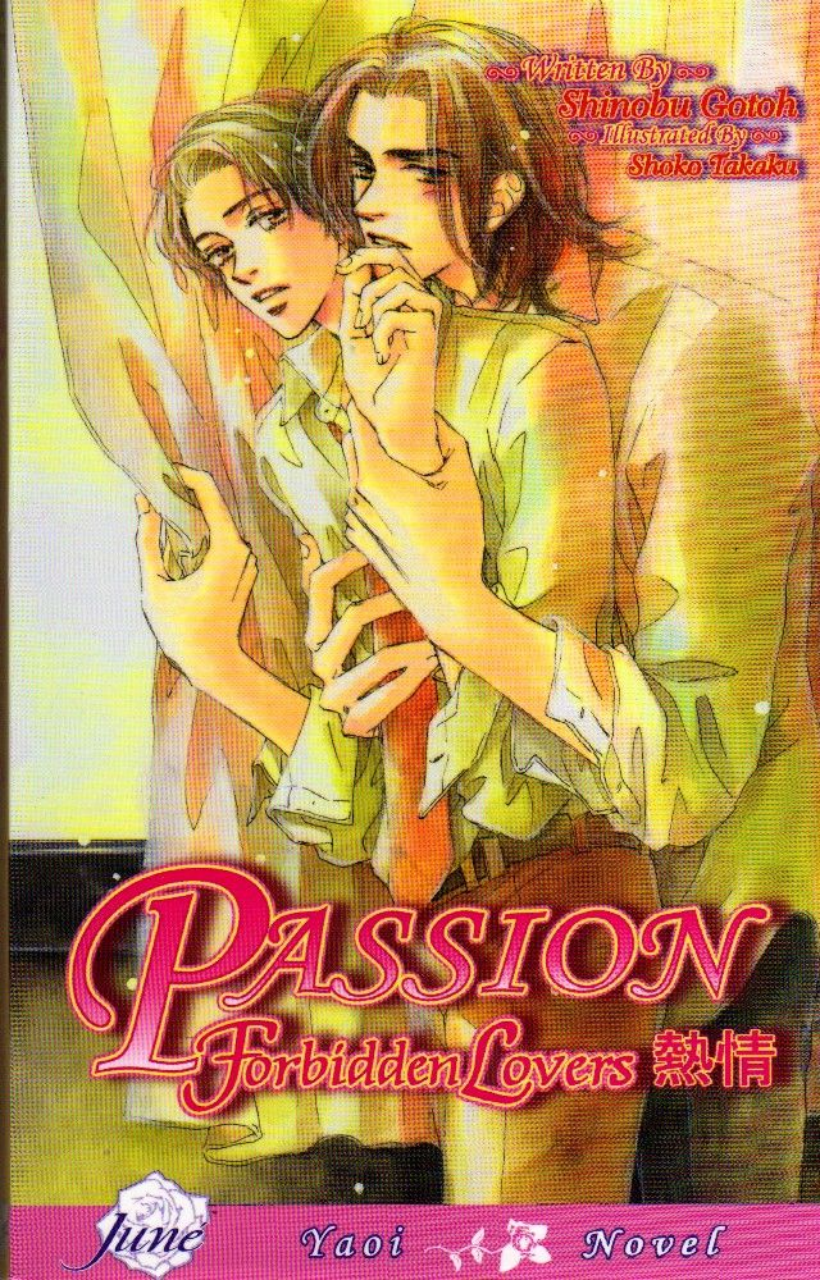




Written By
Shinobu Gotoh
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Shoko Takaku

PASSION

Forbidden Lovers 熱情

June

Yaoi



Novel

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"Shima-sensei..." Hikaru put his arms around his teacher and hugged him gently. "I'm sorry, Sensei. I'm sorry I did this to you. But I...I..." "I've loved you for so long, Sensei." It was a painful confession.

Based on the manga of the same title, *Passion* tells the story of senior high schooler Hikaru Umino who is desperately in love with his teacher, Kuniaki Shima. When he hears a rumor that Shima is engaged to be married, Hikaru does the unthinkable and forces himself upon his teacher. Shima makes him atone for his sin in an unexpected way; he wants Hikaru to be his "make-believe" lover until Hikaru graduates high school.

When the time limit expires, can Hikaru let go of his beloved teacher? And is Shima as indifferent as Hikaru believes him to be? Are Hikaru's passionate feelings really not reaching his teacher?



NOVEL / DRAMA / ROMANCE

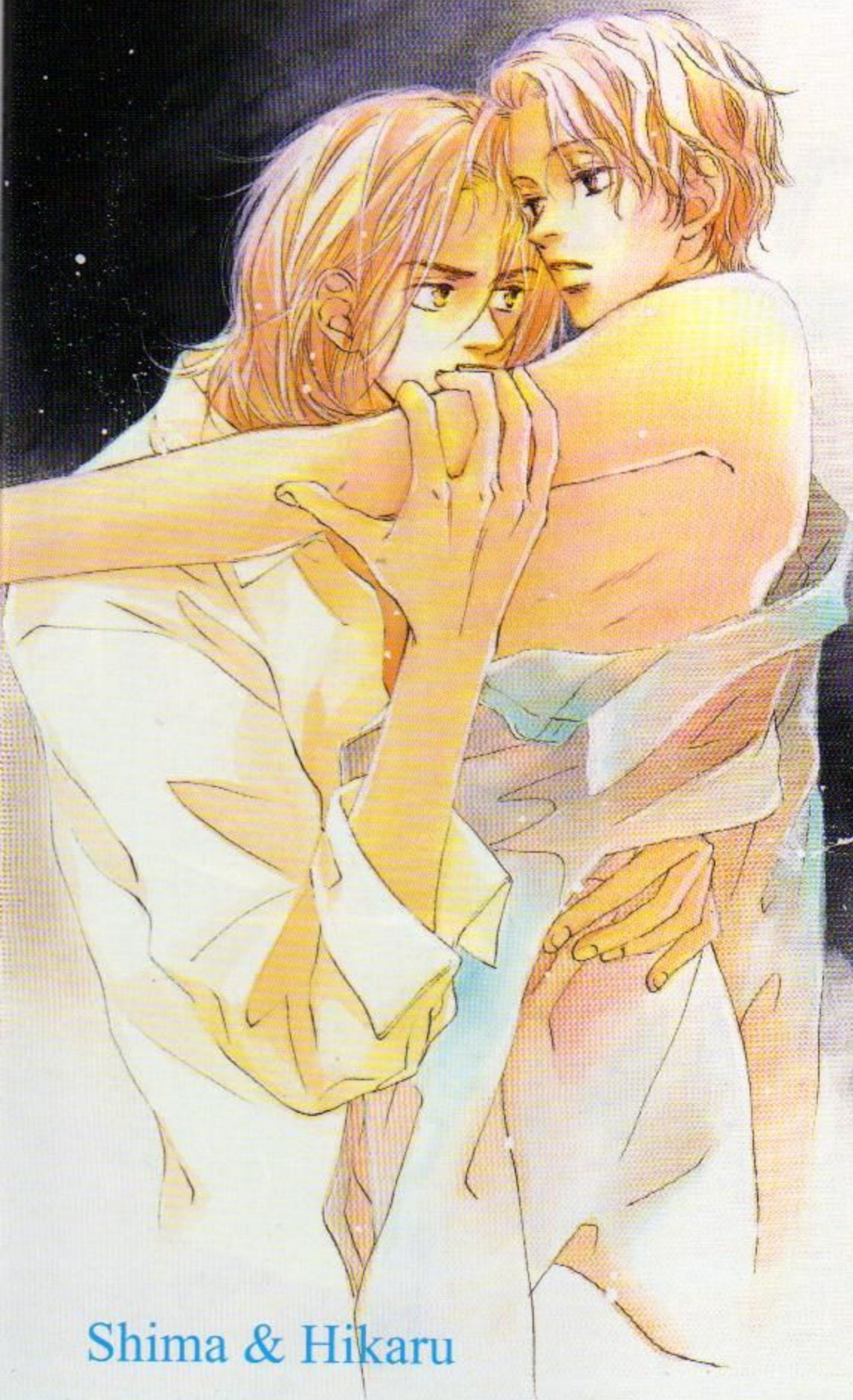
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Shima & Hikaru



PASSION

Forbidden Lovers 熱情

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Christina Chesterfield



Los Angeles

PASSION FORBIDDEN LOVERS

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Chapter One

“Stop it! What are you...ah...” cried a voice from the Social Studies classroom. School was out for the day.

“I love you, Sensei.”

“Get off! Ahh...ugh...”

Low, animalistic pants filled the dusty, supposed to be deserted classroom.

“Sen...sei...!”

Just as the passion was released from his body, the student collapsed down onto his teacher’s chest. His sweaty forehead was broad, giving him a look of wisdom. But, in all reality, he wasn’t doing that well in school lately. Still, he wasn’t the kind of student to engage in this kind of behavior. He wasn’t the kind of student to rape his own high school teacher—his *male* high school teacher.

The student was quite attractive. He was fairly popular among his female classmates, but he was rather childish, so the gap between these two facets of him made his presence stand out even more. Innocent and simple—he had never forgotten a homework assignment, and he kept his promises to a ridiculous degree. He was almost like an elementary school boy. Girls teased him about his innocence. An innocence which actually made it even harder for girls to approach him.

After his breathing calmed, he suddenly realized what he had done. He opened his eyes wide, and a look of both astonishment and terror came over his face. Still inside of his teacher, he and the older man both stared at each other.

The teacher sighed.

"Was that good?"

At the sound of his teacher's angry voice, Hikaru Umino suddenly panicked. He pulled his hips away quickly to withdraw.

His teacher grabbed his collar saying, "Ow! Don't be so rough!"

"I-I'm sorry," Hikaru mumbled.

His teacher tightened his grip on Hikaru to try to stop his erratic movements.

"So you just pounded into me as hard as you could without knowing what to do next? That's terrible."

Hikaru couldn't answer. It was his first time—both rape *and* sex.

"You can't use love as the only reason to attack someone like this," his teacher grunted as he allowed Hikaru to slowly pull out.

But Hikaru knew he was backed into a corner so he asked in a trembling voice, "I-is it true that you're getting married?"

"Shouldn't you have asked me that first?" his teacher asked sarcastically.

Hikaru looked up hesitantly, like a frightened child. A shocked look was still on his face.

I should be the frightened one here, I was the



one who got raped! the teacher thought.

"Of course not! I'm not even seeing anyone!" he said aloud.

Hearing this, Hikaru's face crumpled. "Really? Is that true?"

"Why would I lie now?" his teacher pointed out. "How exactly do you intend to take responsibility for this?"

"P-please marry me!" Hikaru burst out.

"Like I could do that, idiot!" his teacher admonished. In his head he thought, *Men can't marry each other.* He sighed.

"Listen, I don't know if you love me or what, but I don't have feelings like that for you."

Hikaru clenched his jaw. "I know that, but..."

Hearing those words out loud made it even more painful.

"Give me some time to think about what you should do to atone for this," his teacher interrupted. "There's a whole year until you graduate, after all."

"Shima-sensei..." Hikaru put his arms around his teacher and hugged him gently. "I'm sorry, Sensei. I'm sorry I did this to you. But I...I..."

I've loved you for so long, Sensei.

It was a painful confession.

Shima sighed again.

"Oh, someone's still here?"

The staff room was usually deserted after school.

"Oh, it's you, Shima? Let's go home together

for once," called a voice to Shima, who was absent-mindedly wrapping things up at his desk so he could go home.

The voice belonged to his co-worker, Ryuichi Amamiya, who was spinning his key ring around his finger.

Even though he was still wearing a sweat suit, Amamiya had an aura about him of "the picture-perfect adult man." Consequently, he attracted a lot of attention from the female students. He seemed like the kind of person you'd want to get close to, but if you did it carelessly, he would take you for a ride. The smart girls sensibly felt this danger, and counted that among his negative attributes.

Therefore, Kuniaki Shima was an easier target for their affections. He intrigued the girls with his subtle nature and his androgynous, yet still somehow masculine, appearance. Even though he looked like a loner and a "cool beauty," he was surprisingly open, so the female students flocked to him. The reason being that men and women, young and old, love beautiful things.

Shima stared at Amamiya.

"What?" Amamiya asked.

"Nothing," Shima replied. "It's just unusual for you to invite me is all."

In his mind he thought, *He probably only does this once a year.*

"Really?" Amamiya said, feigning ignorance.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I do have an ulterior motive."

"Ulterior motive?" Amamiya might be a rough

person, but he would never be cruel to Shima, and Shima knew this. "What's wrong? Do you need money or something?" he asked casually.

"Umm...kind of," Amamiya mumbled.

"We have two more weeks until pay day, and you already ran out of money?" Shima asked incredulously. "You're careless, as usual."

"If you could just lend me enough money so I can stay in a hotel..." Amamiya trailed off.

"Do you have a good reason?" Shima demanded.

"It's not a big deal," Amamiya explained, "but my apartment's undergoing construction, and the hot water heater is all messed up. I went around and asked my neighbors and they're having the same problem. I put in a work order, but I don't know how many days it'll take. So I don't have any hot water."

"And?" Shima prompted.

"So...can I use the bath at your house, then?" Amamiya requested sheepishly.

"Why me?" Shima asked. "Didn't you say you don't know how long it'll take? So why don't you stay with your lover or something?"

"Oh, didn't you know? I'm free now," Amamiya said, almost carelessly.

"Well, even if you don't have a lover, I'm sure you have somewhere else to go," Shima reasoned out. He privately thought, "There must be tons of girls out there waiting for him."

"But then they'd want me to do something for them," Amamiya complained. "Ever since I was put in

charge of the third year students, I've been so stressed out, so when I come home I just wanna relax. If I stayed with some girl who wasn't even my girlfriend, I'd have to service them every night—it'd be torture!"

"I see," Shima mused.

Service, huh.

"At times like these, it's great to have friends..." Amamiya said hopefully.

"I'll pass," Shima said bluntly.

"So I'll just bring over a little somethi—what?" Amamiya screeched to a halt.

"You have plenty of other friends besides me," Shima said.

"So what?" Amamiya protested. "Besides, your apartment isn't very far from mine."

Shima considered this. "I guess...about 15 minutes by car at the most."

But it takes at least an hour to walk there—that's really far.

"Why can't I, Shimaaaa?" Amamiya wheedled.

Shima looked at Amamiya with a teasing, resentful look. "Because you're a slob. When I come home tired from work, I don't wanna have to clean up your messes."

"What? I am not!" Amamiya cried out, insulted.

"Anyway, why don't you just use the shower in the gym before you go home at night?" Shima suggested. "You're the club advisor, after all, even if it's in name only—you watch everyone else sweat without breaking out in one yourself."

"You're merciless."

"Well, then. Good work today, Amamiya-sensei." Shima picked up his bag and left the room.

Amamiya watched as he disappeared into the dark hallway and smiled. "I knew he'd say no...so why'd I even ask him?"

Amamiya wanted to spend time with Shima today for some unknown reason. Even though he did have a legitimate favor to ask, he just wanted to have some excuse to spend some time with his co-teacher. He'd wanted to take Shima to his apartment, then say something like, "Wanna have dinner together?" Anything to be able to spend the night together. But he didn't know why.

"What am I doing?" Amamiya laughed wryly and crossed his arms. "He was quiet for a little bit after I asked him...he must have been surprised..."

Suddenly Shima seemed very precious to him.

Even though Amamiya would never admit it, those feelings of love he had had *back then* were beginning to surface again. He had rushed to the staff room just to see Shima. But he didn't want Shima to realize this, so he had called out to him as casually as possible. It was so unlike Amamiya. It wasn't like him to feel this way.

Later, Amamiya would deeply regret not chasing after Shima that day, and not convincing him to spend the night together.

Hikaru couldn't remember how he got home. He

couldn't taste much of his dinner. His favorite variety shows on TV seemed strangely distant and uninteresting. When his mother nagged him to go take a bath, he did, but as he took off his undershirt and glanced in the bathroom mirror, he was startled at what he saw. Long, red scratches covered his back. Many of them.

The image snapped him back to reality.

He suddenly remembered that Shima had clawed at his back desperately, begging him to stop. Hikaru's body was suddenly filled with a fiery hot embarrassment. The dark red marks were dried blood, left behind as a sign of Shima's frantic resistance.

"I bet Sensei was in a lot of pain..." Hikaru whispered sadly to his reflection.

Hikaru had known the basics of how men had sex with each other, mainly from curious friends who had a lot of sexual knowledge. They had had conversations about how it was supposed to be really painful, but also how some people said it felt really good. However, none of them had ever actually experienced it themselves so they couldn't really say whether it was actually pleasurable or painful.

But Hikaru hadn't done it just because he had been curious.

He loved Shima. He loved him so much he hadn't been able to contain himself. He didn't know why he hadn't thought of consequences, or of Shima's feelings, or of punishment, or of his parents' shock if they found out—all the normal things any person would consider. His rational judgment had just flown away.

It was his last year of high school, the year when

he had to take college entrance exams. Even having a regular girlfriend would be a lot of trouble, but he had just done something like this.

"Listen, I don't know if you love me or what, but I don't have feelings like that for you."

When had Hikaru first realized that he loved Shima? At first he had just simply thought his teacher was beautiful, regardless of him being another man, regardless of him being a high school teacher. Hikaru had been impressed by him.

Shima was popular among the students, and always the subject of the girls' gossip. Every time Hikaru heard another story about him, his teacher became more and more like a kind of celebrity in his mind. "If only he'd notice me a little bit, if only I could be closer to him" were thoughts that entered Hikaru's mind. It was a common scenario. At some point, Hikaru had begun to see Shima as someone special.

As soon as he realized this, he knew he had fallen in love.

He had watched enviously as girls gave Shima chocolate on Valentine's Day or food they had happily cooked for him in Home Economics. He couldn't help but be really envious. He felt uneasy at the sheer amount of people who seemed to be in love with Shima.

"I was already in too deep, so I should have just told him my feelings," Hikaru muttered.

No matter how much lust he had felt, maybe he should have just ignored it.

Sensei...

If Hikaru had known he would regret it this

much, he should have just confessed his feelings regardless of them being of the same sex or of their age difference. Even if he knew that Shima wouldn't go out with him.

Using the name of Ryuuichi Amamiya, Shima's good friend and a Social Studies teacher, Hikaru had called Shima into that classroom.

Hikaru sighed.

"I don't know if you love me or what, but I don't have feelings like that for you."

"It's only natural..." he mumbled.

It was only natural that Shima hated him.

What I did was a crime.

"Give me some time to think about what you should do to atone for this. There's a whole year until you graduate, after all."

"Atonement, huh..."

But was there anything he could possibly do to atone for such a thing?

"Yes! Today Shima-sensei is doing the gate check!" a group of girls called loudly, running past Hikaru. "Hey, look, Shima-sensei! This is the hot new color for spring!"

"Bringing lipstick to school is against the rules," Shima's voice said strictly. "Why are you so happy to show that to me?"

"Oh, hush!" the excited girl answered. "Look, I have gloss, too! Hey, hey, isn't it pretty?"

"Hey, you over there!" another teacher yelled.

"We're trying to do gate checks! Put down everything that violates the rules and go to your classrooms now!"

Even when pestered by other teachers, the girls didn't move. All Shima did was smile in exasperation.

"Morning, Hikaru," called Hikaru's friend from behind him as Hikaru pushed his bike up a hill near the school gate.

"Ah...morning," Hikaru answered distractedly.

Why, out of all the teachers does Shima have to be one of them doing gate checks today?

"What's wrong?" his friend asked. "Being cheerful is one of your few good points. You look pretty depressed."

"Really? No, I'm fine." But Hikaru couldn't muster up the strength to smile. He couldn't face Shima. His steps became even slower.

But a different teacher checked Hikaru and his friends' bags. "C'mon, open your bag."

I just have to suffer the consequences. But it's strange that Sensei isn't making a big deal out of it. Normally if you did what I did to a teacher, it would be immediate expulsion.

But that fateful afternoon, after Hikaru had done such a terrible thing, all Shima had said was "Don't worry about me, just go home."

His tone of voice hadn't even been reproachful. And when Hikaru had just stood there frozen with panic, Shima had given him a push from behind to go out the door.

Out in the hallway, the door to the classroom had closed behind Hikaru. He didn't know what Shima

had done after that, but it bothered him. He was really concerned about Shima and felt like he hadn't the right nor the courage to face him.

Unable to stand the thought of his crime, Hikaru didn't want Shima to notice him, yet found himself desperately searching for any sight of his teacher. He missed Shima. Shima was so beautiful it seemed unfair.

When Hikaru thought of his crime, he couldn't relax. He found it hard to breathe when he had sudden, merciless flashbacks of Shima's voice, his hot breath, his face, his smooth skin...

He wondered what Shima would suggest for his atonement. He absentmindedly walked to the bike rack adjacent to the school building, oblivious to all the people around him.

The apartment building was colored red by the setting sun. Looking up at the window of the corner apartment on the third floor, Hikaru whispered, "I thought stalkers were terrible, but now I think I kind of understand them."

He smiled wryly and tightly gripped the handles of his bike. But unlike a stalker, he fully knew that Shima didn't like him one bit.

"But I still came all the way here to look up at his room," he muttered.

Hikaru wanted to know what kind of place Shima lived in, so he'd looked up Shima's address in the employee register.

"I didn't realize it because it's in the opposite

direction from my house, but we live pretty close..." he continued to muse.

It was only about 10 minutes from school by bike. His own house was about the same distance in the other direction.

"So I guess Sensei goes to school by bike, too."

Shima could go to work fairly easily, barring the large hill near the school's gate.

Hikaru felt happy knowing just that small thing. He started to think of irrelevant things like: "If Shima-sensei has gears on his bike he could probably scale that hill easily."

He looked up at the window from the corner of the parking lot, tucked away from sight. He was drawn to the light-colored curtains that hung over the empty window. At last, he gave a small sigh and said, "Guess I'll go home."

He turned his bike back to the direction he came from. As he pedaled with all his might, no matter how hard he tried to stop the tears from flowing, they still fell and were carried off by the wind.

Even though he knew Shima wasn't considering him and his feelings should be cooling off, his feelings just grew stronger. Ever since that day in the classroom, Shima had been acting like nothing had ever happened between them.

The morning that Shima had been at the gate check, after Hikaru had put his bag down in the classroom, he realized he had forgotten his English dictionary, so he'd gone to a friend's class to borrow one. In the hallway, Hikaru had caught sight of Shima.

Many students had been passing by his teacher, exchanging morning greetings.

"Why?" Hikaru had whispered.

Shima had just been at the school gate, so why was he there already? At this surprise meeting, it had seemed as if Hikaru's heart would fly from his chest. Pitifully, his knees had started trembling and he couldn't stop it.

Suddenly, Shima's gaze had turned to Hikaru. Hikaru didn't know how he should react. Just as he clenched his teeth, Shima had said, in the exact same tone of voice he used for other students, "Good morning, Umino."

He had said it in that slightly low, pleasant voice Hikaru loved so much. And after that casual greeting, Shima had quietly walked past Hikaru.

"Huh?"

Hikaru had stared, dumbfounded, at Shima's back. Shima's attitude was so normal and natural, it felt like the day before had never even happened.

"Morning..."

For some reason, that casual greeting had been terribly painful. It was almost worse than being ignored. It was as if Shima was proclaiming, "I don't think much about you, or what happened yesterday." Like he wasn't taking Hikaru's love for him seriously. Like it was hopeless.

Only a few days had passed since then, but Hikaru almost felt that attacking Shima had just been a dream.

"But I still love you..." he whispered to the

wind. If he couldn't tell Shima his feelings, he might as well let the wind carry them where it may. He couldn't hate Shima. He couldn't forget it.

"I love you, Sensei..."

"Oh, Hikaru, are you stopping by the bookstore near the train station again today?" a friend of Hikaru's asked by the school gate.

"Uh...uhh... Well, I'm looking for a reference book and I just can't find it," Hikaru said as an excuse, and pulled his bike out to walk with his friends who were headed towards the train station.

"Well, whatever," his friend said. "We usually walk home in opposite ways, but I always thought that kinda sucked."

"Huh? Why?"

"'Cuz if I walk with you, girls always look our way. So it gives me a little boost." His friend laughed, without a hint of jealousy in his voice.

If he was with Hikaru, girls would pay more attention to him. All of Hikaru's classmates knew that Hikaru wasn't as confident on the inside as his good looks might suggest. He could draw girls in, but nothing would come out of it. After girls were disillusioned by Hikaru, they would drift to his friends. So even though Hikaru was good-looking, his male friends couldn't dislike him, couldn't feel any enmity towards him. But of course, students from other schools didn't know this, so just Hikaru's looks were effective enough to catch the attention of girls.

Just as his friend had hoped, numerous interested girls approached them from afar, and some were very attractive. They asked if they wanted to go out for tea, or if they could exchange phone numbers.

Hikaru was honestly confused. He had the opportunity to talk to girls, but his head had been in the clouds. When asked, "Can I have your number?" he'd make some lame excuse like, "I don't have a cell phone," or "I forgot it at home."

After this, Hikaru parted with his friends by acting like he was searching for a book as he killed time in the bookstore. It was getting dark outside when he pedaled down the brightly-lit road, heading for Shima's house. He was anxious and hesitant, but his legs still carried him to that place.

"Ah, the lights are on," he observed. Faint light escaped through the curtains from Shima's apartment window. "Sensei's home already."

He didn't see any shadows behind the curtains, but he had a painful feeling in his chest just imagining Shima's figure. Every day he told himself he'd go straight home after just catching a glimpse of Shima's apartment, but every day he lingered there instead.

It wasn't like he was going to do anything, or expected anything, but the longer he stayed, the harder it was to go home. He was in his usual place in the corner of the parking lot, spacing out, when a car's headlights approached. A small domestic car pulled into a spot in the parking lot.

Hikaru recognized it.

"That's Amamiya-sensei's car."

Amamiya Ryuichi, Shima's good friend, whom he had apparently invited over. Hikaru concealed himself and watched as Amamiya entered Shima's apartment humming.

When a girl at school had asked Shima about Amamiya, saying their relationship seemed suspicious, Shima had answered coolly, "We're friends here at work, but not good enough friends that we'd hang out afterwards. We don't even know where each other lives."

"He was lying." Hikaru's heart pounded.

Before he realized it, he was standing in front of Shima's door. Although he had come to Shima's apartment many times, he had never considered going near the door. If Amamiya hadn't arrived, Hikaru probably would never be standing there.

Even though he had come all the way to the door, he didn't have the courage to knock. He was anxious and worried about Amamiya, but he would rather die than act desperately like this. He was unable to move when suddenly a pizza delivery boy walked up the stairs.

"Huh?"

Seeing Hikaru's face, the boy said, "Sorry to keep you waiting!" and held out the pizza box.

"I-I don't live here."

"Oh, I know," the boy answered. "Shima-sensei always gets a medium, but tonight he ordered a large and a ton of side orders. Plus, it's Saturday, so I figured he had some of his students over."

"Shima...sensei? Huh?"

"Oh, I'm a former student of his. In other words,

your *senpai*," the boy said amiably, piling the pizza boxes in Hikaru's hands. He pushed the button on the intercom. "Sorry to keep you waiting. Your pizza is—"

The door opened before he got a chance to finish, and Amamiya gleefully bounced out. He was not wearing a shirt. "Finally! I'm so hungry I thought I was gonna die!"

"Geh!" the delivery boy cried out. "Amamiya-sensei, why are you dressed like that?"

"Yo!" Amamiya answered amiably. "Long time no see. I was just about to take a bath when the doorbell rang, so I decided to eat first! But—hey! Why is Umino helping you deliver pizzas?"

"Umino?" Shima peeked over Amamiya's shoulder. His eyes widened in surprise and he said, "What are you doing here?"

Hikaru was unable to hide his embarrassment. Meanwhile, Amamiya grabbed the piping hot pizza and disappeared into the apartment, saying cheerfully, "I'm gonna go ahead and eat!"

After the boy was paid, he went away immediately, leaving just Shima and Hikaru at the door.

"I-I'm sorry." Hikaru quickly bowed and turned on his heel to run away.

But Shima grabbed his arm and stopped him.

"Wait, Umino. Amamiya ordered all that pizza and there's no way we can finish it. Why don't you come in and eat?"

"...What?"

Hikaru couldn't believe his ears.

Hikaru had never dreamt he would be invited inside Shima's apartment. Even though he should have been hungry, his heart felt so full that he couldn't eat much. After dinner, Amamiya took a bath. He and Shima were on such good terms it seemed like they were lovers or something. As more time passed, Hikaru couldn't stand it anymore, and just when he was about to say he was leaving, Amamiya said, "I'm gonna head home now. I'm pretty sleepy."

"Okay. Be careful," Shima said.

Hikaru listened with his heart pounding to Shima's response. He had been afraid Shima was going to say, "Then why don't you just spend the night?" Tomorrow was Sunday, after all.

Maybe they weren't as close as he thought.

Seizing the opportunity from Amamiya, Hikaru tried to leave, too.

"Ah, Sensei, I should go home, too."

"Hey, Umino! Don't think you can make a mess and just leave. At least wash the dishes you used," Shima ordered unreasonably.

"Amamiya made a mess, too," Hikaru wanted to complain, but it was 10 years too soon to grumble to his teachers.

"Shima, don't work him too hard. He's a minor," Amamiya teased as he put on his shoes.

"Like you have room to talk. You make your students go buy your lunch for you!" Shima replied with his arms crossed.

"I guess you're right," Amamiya said dryly.



"Thanks for letting me use your bath and for the pizza." He then said to Hikaru, "See you later, Umino. Be careful going home, too." He waved goodbye, smiling, and Hikaru nodded awkwardly.

Left behind, alone with Shima, Hikaru was confused and uneasy. He wasn't sure if Shima knew this, but his teacher piled on the dirty dishes for Hikaru to clean up anyway. Hikaru soon found himself doing not only his own dishes, but everyone else's, too. After he was done, Shima gave him a can of beer as a reward.

"Huh? But I'm a minor," Hikaru protested.

What was Shima thinking, giving a student alcohol?

"That's weird, Sensei."

"Raping your teacher is pretty weird, too," Shima replied calmly.

He persuaded Hikaru to accompany him in his evening drink. Then, with beer in hand, he showed Hikaru around the apartment. Hikaru was as unsteady as a small boat being tossed about in a storm, but he followed behind Shima.

They peeked at the small bathroom Amamiya had just used.

"He kept it pretty clean for once," Shima commented.

Hikaru began to feel more uneasy at this comment. If Shima and Amamiya weren't that close, how did Shima know that?

Friendly co-workers...they had probably been friends since they started working at the school, maybe six years ago. Hikaru felt jealous at the teasing sound

in Shima's voice when he talked to Amamiya—and the way they apparently borrowed each other's baths.

But I have no right to feel jealous.

"And this is my room," Shima announced.

"...Oh."

Shima's room was very neat. His bed was made properly. It was larger than Hikaru's single bed.

"I toss and turn at night, so if I don't have a full-size bed, I'll seriously fall out of it," Shima said, laughing.

Hikaru never imagined that Shima would show him this room, especially after what had happened between them. He wondered if it was an implicit message to tell him, "I really don't care about the other day, and I don't take you seriously."

The bed Shima used every night...he must have spent time with his lovers in that bed. Even though Hikaru didn't know whether or not Shima had a lover, and even though Shima said he wasn't engaged, a fiancée and a lover were two different things. And even if he didn't have someone else, he probably laid there and did it by himself...Ahhhhhhh!

"Sensei, you're always so calm. I can't believe you toss and turn at night." Hikaru tried to sound as casual as possible.

"If the springs are weak, I can't sleep well. But this bed is pretty good." Shima sat down on the bed and patted the mattress, urging Hikaru to sit down next to him.

"You're right. It doesn't sink in at all," Hikaru said, then suddenly panicked. The two of them were on

Shima's bed in his dimly-lit bedroom. His heart pounded wildly.

"Umino, if you hold your beer with both hands, it'll get warm and it won't taste very good."

Just as Shima reached out to take the can of beer and his fingers were about to touch Hikaru's, Hikaru dropped the can without thinking. Panicking, he went to his knees to pick it up off the floor at the same time as Shima did. Their fingertips touched, their eyes met...and Hikaru suddenly embraced Shima. They sat on the floor as Hikaru pressed his lips against Shima's and groped him, carried away by his passion. For some reason, Shima did not pull away.

Their second time having sex gave Hikaru so much pleasure it felt like he was floating away.

"It's already ten o'clock." Shima's hoarse voice was extremely charming. "Umino, it's getting late, so why don't you spend the night?"

"Huh? B-but, I'm not a girl, and—" Hikaru said hesitantly.

"Crime doesn't discriminate against gender," Shima argued sensibly. "I can't let you go home by yourself this late. And unlike Amamiya, I don't have a car to drive you home with."

Hikaru said, "I brought my bike. It'll only take about 15 minutes to get home."

"Here's the phone," said Shima, ignoring Hikaru's protest.

Hikaru figured there was no use in arguing about it, and took the phone. He dialed the number to his house.

"Where are you?" his mother screeched

immediately. "Why didn't you call me earlier?"

Hikaru couldn't hide his embarrassment upon hearing his mother's voice. After all, he was completely naked, and the person he loved was right next to him, watching him closely—also completely naked.

"I'm sorry," Hikaru stuttered. "Um, I'm at a friend's house, and we're having a lot of fun so everyone's gonna stay over..."

"Then why didn't you call me earlier?" his mother demanded. "You forgot your cell phone at home again."

"I'm sorry, Mom."

"Don't come home too late tomorrow, got it?"

"Uh-huh."

"And behave yourself, got it?"

"Uh-huh."

"Goodbye."

"Uh-huh."

When Hikaru hung up the phone, Shima burst out laughing.

"It's not that funny, Sensei," Hikaru protested.

"Wow, she treats you like you're in kindergarten!" Shima howled.

"Mom talks too loud..." Hikaru grumbled.

I guess he heard everything—the one person I didn't want to hear it.

He returned the receiver with a disgusted look on his face.

Shima stopped laughing and asked, "Do you love me that much?"

When their bodies had been one, just as he had

during their first time, Hikaru had told Shima he loved him over and over again. Hikaru quickly nodded.

"Even if your grades aren't that good, you're not stupid. So why do you do stupid things?" Shima shook his head, exasperated. "If it's for pretend, I'll go out with you."

"For pretend?" Hikaru echoed.

"Like playing doctor or playing shop when you were little," Shima clarified. "We could play like we're lovers."

"Play like we're lovers?" Hikaru parroted.

"But there'll be a time limit," Shima warned. "I'll go out with you only until you graduate."

"Sensei!" Hikaru's eyes shone.

"And one more thing," Shima added. "If either of us gets tired of it before you graduate, it's over, regardless of the time limit. If you're okay with that, I'll go out with you—Oof!"

Hikaru tightly embraced him.

"Then starting tonight, you're my lover, Sensei!"

He was overcome with happiness.

"But we'll be in big trouble if anyone finds out, so you have to be very careful," Shima said.

"I will!" Hikaru promised readily.

"So stop coming to look at my apartment every day," Shima said bluntly. "If you have that much free time, you should spend it studying for entrance exams."

Hikaru drooped a little.

"Ah..."

Busted.

"If your grades drop, don't blame it on me," Shima continued. "And I'll have a guilty conscience if you fail your entrance exams. So you better study your ass off this year."

No matter what the motive was, even if it was for pretend, Shima had agreed to be Hikaru's lover.

"I will, I promise, so..." Hikaru's feelings were floating because of this miraculous event.

"What?" Shima prompted.

"Um..."

Fully aware that it was shameless, Hikaru continued, "C-can we go out on dates occasionally?"

"If I feel like it," Shima said coolly, but he nodded.

Yes!

"And, um, um, can we...do it again?" Hikaru asked hopefully.

"Do what?" Shima laughed as he felt a change in a part of Hikaru's body.

Hikaru hesitated, like a dog waiting for orders from its master.

Smiling, Shima pulled him close.

"Don't be rough...we've already done it twice."

"But doesn't that really mean nothing's changed?" Hikaru mused.

If no one else knew about the game of "pretend lovers," nothing special would happen on a day-to-day basis.

"Maybe I'm in a worse situation now than I was

before,” Hikaru moaned.

That’s right—his daily trip to Shima’s apartment was now forbidden. On top of that, it was not like they could talk freely at school, and they hadn’t arranged any dates.

“I wonder when I can see him next,” Hikaru whispered near the crowded bike rack after school on Monday.

He couldn’t believe he realized something this important only now. Had he realized it yesterday, or Sunday, he would have made Shima promise to see him sometime.

“I’m so stupid!” Hikaru wailed softly.

If we didn’t promise to see each other again, this might be the end of it!

“Maybe I’m just really gullible.”

Shima had brought up the game of pretend lovers, but maybe he just took advantage of Hikaru’s premature joy in order to distance himself?

No, Shima-sensei isn’t that kind of person.

Hikaru shook his head vigorously and straddled the bicycle seat. Shima wasn’t the kind of person to deceive others.

You better study your ass off this year.

“Ah...”

That’s right. Shima had been encouraging him.

Hikaru stopped his bike and looked over his shoulder at the school building.

“Shima.” Amamiya grabbed Shima’s arm in the

middle of the deserted hallway.

“Ah! You scared me! Don’t just sneak up on me from behind like that, Amamiya!” Shima laughed.

“I’ll treat you to dinner tonight,” Amamiya said frankly.

“Huh? What’s with you, all of a sudden?” Shima asked.

“It’ll be about eight o’clock when the club activities are over,” Amamiya said. “And it’s to thank you for Saturday. For the bath and the pizza.”

“That’s what friends are for,” said Shima. “You don’t have to thank me.”

“Do you already have plans?” Amamiya inquired.

“Not really...” Shima trailed off then said suspiciously, “You’re acting weird, Amamiya.”

The truth was, Amamiya wanted to be “alone” with Shima.

When they had been in high school, they had gone out for two years. But during the spring of their third year of high school, Amamiya had broken up with Shima, using the entrance exams as an excuse. Even though Amamiya had never told him the real reason, Shima had always known the truth. It was a painful reason, and Amamiya was a kind person, so he had never said it out loud.

Of course, Shima also knew they hadn’t broken up because Amamiya didn’t have feelings for him. But it took many years to forget him.

Coincidentally, they had both gotten jobs at the same school after graduation. They had tried to be

friends, but Amamiya had always held back. He hadn't wanted to be near Shima anymore. Not because he hated him, but as a precaution. He hadn't wanted those feelings to return.

Shima had sensed this, and never approached him unless it was absolutely necessary. Which explained his misgivings about Amamiya's suddenly friendly attitude.

"Hey, Shima, something's been bothering me lately," Amamiya said, trying to change the subject. "Why did Umino come to your apartment on Saturday night? You're not in charge of his class."

"Maybe he has a friend that lives in my complex? I don't know the details. But it looked like he got mixed up in that pizza delivery somehow," Shima said, laughing.

"Yeah, I guess it didn't look like he had any business with you," Amamiya said.

Shima was the one who had invited Hikaru inside, and the boy had been about to go home right after Amamiya did. Amamiya was worrying too much.

"So did you make him clean up?" he asked.

"Of course," said Shima.

"Did he get home okay?" Amamiya asked. "It was getting pretty late."

Shima stared at him and said, "Amamiya, I understand you're playing the role of concerned teacher here, but stop asking me so many questions. You're acting weird."

Asking him to borrow his bath, saying he'd treat him to dinner...where was his usual caution? "Do I look

so helpless that you're asking me out because you pity me?"

Was it still like that?

"No, that's not it," Amamiya quickly denied.

"Then what is it?" Shima prompted.

"Let's get back together, Shima," Amamiya burst out.

"What?" Shima cried.

Amamiya pulled Shima closer. "Let's get back together."

He embraced him tightly.

It was quiet, big, bright, and cool, with not too many people around, and it was just upstairs from the staff room in case he had any questions.

Hikaru was quietly satisfied.

"This is pretty good."

He knew he had to "study his ass off." When he'd asked a friend how to improve his grades, his friend had told him that he went to the study room after school. He had been tempted to just go straight home, but figured he'd be distracted by TV or taking naps. So it was easier to focus in the study room.

"Oooh, I'm impressed!"

Hikaru was startled by the sudden voice close to his ear. Shima sat down next to him, and Hikaru's face went bright red. Since he hadn't seen him for a while, Shima seemed so much more beautiful that seeing his face made Hikaru dizzy.

"I'm even more impressed that you were so

focused on studying that you didn't even notice me," Shima whispered.

There were only a few students left studying after school, and those who were there were immersing themselves in their studies, so luckily, none of them took any particular notice of Shima. Hikaru had so many things he wanted to say to Shima, but they were in the study room. Moreover, his heart was beating so fast, his face was red, and he just couldn't find the words.

"By the way, Umino, did you turn your cell phone off?" Shima asked.

"Hm? Uh..."

Hikaru quickly took out his cell phone from his bag.

Just as he checked the screen, Shima said, "Oh, so you didn't forget it at home *again*?" and grabbed the phone out of his hands.

"I-it's not like I forget stuff every day," Hikaru mumbled.

"Because you're not a kindergartener, right?" Shima said, chuckling. "You didn't turn it off, but you do have it on vibrate. Good boy."

"Oh, good—ah, Sensei, what are you doing?"

Shima was pressing buttons.

"Checking your call log, of course," he answered. Then he mouthed, "Because we're lovers, right?"

Hikaru's heart thumped. He tried to grab the phone back, but Shima skillfully avoided it.

"Give it to me, Sensei!" he urged.

"Shh! This is a study room!" Shima said

teasingly, and then returned his cell phone.

"Geez!" Hikaru checked the screen and saw an unfamiliar ten-digit number. "I-is this your...!" He quickly turned around, but Shima had already gone.

Hikaru automatically pressed the enter button. Now the number was saved in his contact list. Had he gotten a call before he'd saved it, the number would have been erased. But now it was safe.

Then, Hikaru accidentally pushed the send button. If it went through, Shima might scold him for using his phone at school. Just as he was about to hang up, he heard Shima's voice quietly say, "Hello?"

He couldn't hang up now. Even if he was going to be scolded, he didn't want to hang up! He quickly walked out onto the veranda.

"Hello, Sensei?"

"Yeah...oh, it's you, Umino?"

Hikaru was a little hurt by those words, but he still said, "Sensei, thank you for giving me your number."

He had been so uneasy, but now he was extremely happy.

"You kept your promise to me about studying, so think of it as your reward," Shima said.

"Um, um, so can I call you at this number?" Hikaru asked.

"Isn't that what you're doing right now?" Shima teased.

"T-that's not what I mean. Um..."

Hikaru trailed off as a new thought entered his mind. Maybe Shima had just told him the number in case

of emergency or something. He hesitated

But Shima chuckled. "It's okay. If I'm busy you can just leave a message, so you can call whenever you feel like it."

"But I might feel like it every day...lots of times every day!" Hikaru said.

Shima just laughed.

"Sensei..."

"Hm?"

"Thanks."

"You just thanked me before."

But I was so uneasy.

"I'll study hard."

"You'd better."

Sensei.

"Umm..."

Sensei.

"Oh, that's right," Shima said as Hikaru again hesitated. "If you get a good score on your next test, wanna go somewhere together?"

What?!

"I-I-I-I-Is th-th-that—is that a d-da-date?" Hikaru stammered.

"If you do better than last time on your test," Shima said.

"All right!" Hikaru whooped. "All right! Yeah, I'll go!"

"If you do worse, though, you can't call me for a month," Shima interrupted.

"Whaaaat?"

"So do your best. See ya," Shima said coolly,

and then the line went dead.

Hikaru stared at his phone for a bit.

The record of his conversation with Shima was in his call history. "Playing like we're lovers was true..." he thought. He was unbelievably happy.

"What would you do if you asked an ex to get back together and they said, 'Why?' What do you think?" Amamiya asked the school nurse with a serious look on his face.

There were no students in the infirmary after school, just Amamiya and the beautiful school nurse, Chihaya Morikawa. During the day, students often stopped by the infirmary for rest or relief, but it was rare for a teacher to stop by as often as Amamiya did.

"That probably means there's no chance," Morikawa answered bluntly.

"...That's what I was afraid of," Amamiya said with a sigh.

"That doesn't sound like you, though," Morikawa remarked. She knew that Amamiya was usually a man who didn't dwell on the past—a confident man. "So you're saying you want to get back together with someone that *you* dumped?"

"Yeah, I really do," Amamiya answered.

"Why?" Morikawa inquired.

"Love, I guess," Amamiya said.

"Well, it seems like you're the only one who feels that way," Morikawa observed.

"Sensei? This is a good opportunity, so why

don't you try to analyze this yourself?"

"Who, me?" Amamiya asked.

"I understand you're a playboy, so I feel sorry for your ex if they had to put up with that," said Morikawa.

"We didn't break up because I hated them or anything," Amamiya protested.

He hadn't. But he did break up with him because he didn't want to *start* hating him.

"So for some unknown reason, you want to get back together now?" Morikawa asked.

"No, but...I don't know." Stroking his chin, Amamiya looked down, lost in thought.

"You're already 28, right?" Morikawa inquired. "So this time you want to start over with marriage in mind?"

"What?" Amamiya looked up, dumbfounded. "Marriage?" To Shima?

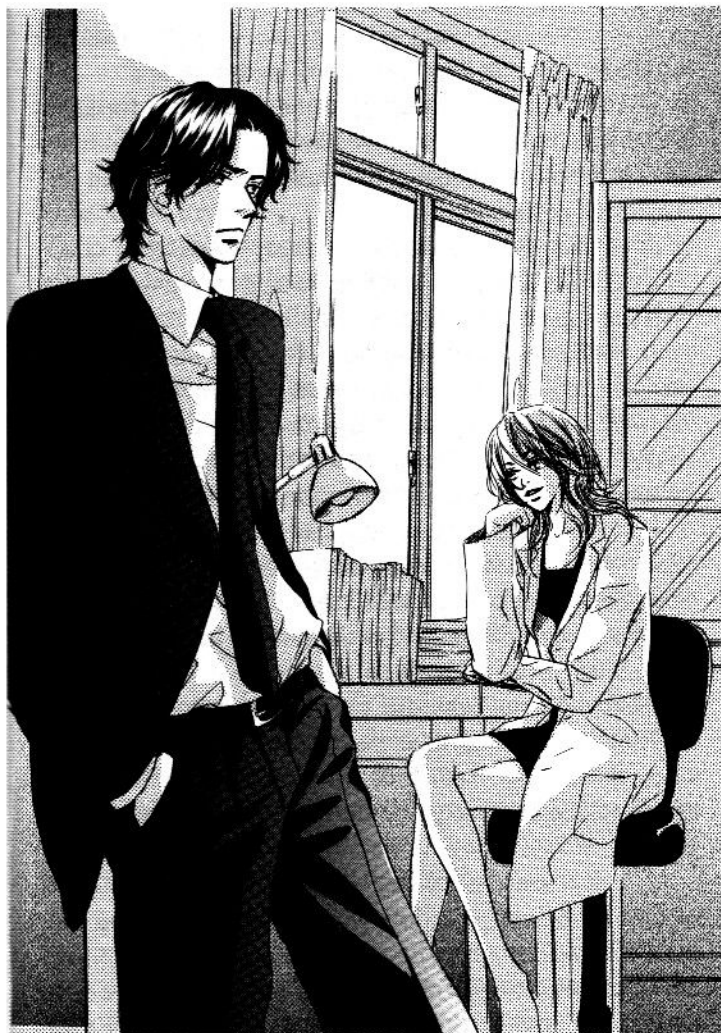
"Oh, you're not? You don't want that kind of commitment with them?" she said in a critical voice.

"Marriage is...out of the question," Amamiya replied hesitantly.

Just having others find out they were dating would cause enough trouble.

"I give up, then." Morikawa rested her chin in her hands and continued, "I understand where your ex is coming from. I'd ask why, too. Amamiya-sensei, why do you want to get back together with them, seriously?"

"Ah..." Amamiya thought again. "I'm not sure myself. But lately they've just been on my mind, and I find myself thinking about when we were together—when we met, when we were totally in love with each other..."



"Hmmm..."

"We only went out for two years," Amamiya told her, "but a lot happened...and we broke up."

"You mean you dumped them, right?" Morikawa asked bluntly.

"You don't have to sound so mean about it!" Amamiya protested.

"I'm just stating the obvious," Morikawa said.

"Yeah, thanks," Amamiya said with a wry smile. "Maybe I am too egotistical."

During their high school days, on their days off, all Shima would do was wait for Amamiya to call him—it was burdensome. He took everything Amamiya said so seriously and had been really clingy. It was too oppressive to be loved by someone so completely.

The reason Amamiya had wanted to run away from Shima was because of that problem. He knew there were those that wanted that kind of love. But when he had been with Shima, he realized that he didn't know what kind of love he liked yet, since it had been his first love. Shima was the kind of person who would try to be everything their partner wanted them to be—align themselves with their interests, and it had been exasperating. Amamiya couldn't be with someone like that.

But it wasn't Shima's fault he was like that. And of course Amamiya didn't blame Shima for being like that. It wasn't about who was the bad guy. When they first went out, they knew they weren't compatible with each other, and so they had broken up. But even after that, Amamiya still felt Shima's eyes on him.

"They never really saw me..." Amamiya mused.

But he knew Shima had taken his eyes off him a long time ago. Amamiya was the one continuing to think about Shima. He had been the one fixated on the past.

"So that's how it is..." he mumbled as he realized the truth.

The heaviness of that realization was hard to bear, but he finally felt like he understood his dilemma. He had loved Shima all along.

"Do you feel like you can sort out your feelings?" Morikawa prompted.

"I think I already have." Somehow, Amamiya had always been conscious of Shima, and it wasn't because he wanted to run away. "I guess I'm still pretty hung up on them."

"Really..." She nodded slightly. "If you aren't considering marriage, but still want to get back together with them, you might as well start from a one-sided love."

"A one-sided love?" When Amamiya thought about it, he had basically already been doing that this whole time.

"Amamiya-sensei, you might have never experienced one, but a one-sided love has its own merits, you know," Morikawa said wisely.

At six, he might still be finishing up work at school...at eight he might be eating dinner...and at nine he might finally be free, or he could be taking a bath.

Hikaru had been so indecisive about when would be best to call Shima, it was already ten o'clock before he knew it.

Well, he had already done his homework and taken a bath, but it would be rude to call his teacher's house or his cell phone this late, but...

"It's okay. If I'm busy you can just leave a message, so you can call whenever you feel like it."

"It's fine, it's fine," he told himself. "Sensei told me I could call whenever I wanted."

If his teacher was busy, his voice mail would pick up—and although that would be disappointing, at least it wouldn't be disturbing him.

All right!

Finally deciding to go for it, Hikaru opened the contact list on his cell phone. He selected the "Significant Other" group. He had never been able to enter a number into this group before so just that small step made his heart pound with happiness. When he had entered the contact information, he was unsure about what to put, but he finally decided on Shima's first name, "Kuniaki."

Kuniaki Shima. Even though they were "lovers," he didn't dare call Shima "Kuniaki" when they were together. So Hikaru put all his desires into his phone and entered Shima's first name.

"I'll hang up as soon as I thank him for today and tell him goodnight," he murmured.

He'd keep it short so as not to bother his teacher. He'd talk to him normally, casually. He didn't want to be a burden. He didn't want Sensei to hate him. His heart beat so loudly that he could hear it in his ears as he

listened to the phone ringing. Finally, the ringing stopped and he held his breath. He shouldn't be so nervous; he had just seen him and talked to him on the phone that day, but when he thought of being able to talk to Shima again, his knees trembled.

"The person you have called is not available..."

It was the voicemail recording.

Hikaru sighed. He suddenly felt exhausted.

"Man..."

I guess he's busy right now. What's he doing at ten o'clock?

"Probably a lot...he's an adult, after all."

"Please leave a message after the beep."

What should he say?

"Um, good evening...um, um, th-thank you for today. I'm so happy I got to see you, even for a little bit. Good ni—" The message got cut off before he finished it.

He sighed once again. He couldn't muster up the willpower to call back, so he put his cell phone on his desk. He opened the textbook which he had just closed, but no matter how much he stared at the problems, all he could do was sigh.

All of a sudden, his cell phone rang, startling him. "H-holy crap, that scared me!" He picked up the phone. "Ah!"

On the screen it said "Kuniaki."

In the confusion of the moment, he almost forgot which button to push.

"H-hello!"

"Sorry, Umino, I was in the bathtub," Shima's

voice said softly.

"...Sensei!"

Hikaru had been so nervous, but that all melted away when he heard Shima's voice. He couldn't believe Shima had actually called him back.

"How's your studying going?" Shima asked.

"Good," answered Hikaru. "I'm making some progress."

"If you need help with something, you can always come ask me in the staff room," Shima proposed.

"Huh? Seriously? You'd help me?" Hikaru asked.

"In the staff room," Shima said again.

"Wow..." Hikaru gushed, then added, "but is it really okay?"

"Is what okay?" Shima asked.

"You don't even teach my grade," Hikaru clarified.

"You're right, but do you really have time to complain?" Shima pointed out. "Last year's third year students were the same...they'd be at their wit's end and grab the first teacher they see to ask for help."

When Hikaru had been studying in the study room, he had thought that if there was something he didn't understand then he could go to the staff room downstairs. But that he shouldn't ask Shima. He knew he wouldn't be able to talk to Shima easily enough because it would seem strange for a student to ask a teacher not in charge of their grade for help.

But I guess that's not the case.

"I suddenly feel really motivated," Hikaru murmured, and Shima laughed.

"Umino, motivation is important, but so is sleep," Shima advised. "If you don't sleep well, your brain won't work properly. Make sure all your studying isn't for nothing, and get enough sleep every night."

"Okay, I'll get good sleep and study hard." He'd study his ass off. "But Sensei, I wanna see you. Not a proper date or anything—but like today—I just want to see your face and talk to you."

"Is talking the only thing you want to do?" Shima asked teasingly.

Hikaru blushed and said, "Th-that's not what I mean...I want to get to know you more."

Because he didn't really know anything about Shima. He didn't know how Shima spent his nights, what kind of food he liked, what kind of TV shows he watched, what kind of games he liked, why he became a teacher, and why he hadn't blamed Hikaru for doing something so terrible to him, and why he was playing this game of "make-believe lovers." There were so many things Hikaru wanted to know.

"Because...I love you, Sensei, so I want to know more about you," he added.

"You're not going to tell me about yourself?" Shima asked.

"Well, I can't help it if you're not interested in me," Hikaru pointed out.

"Listen, I don't know if you love me or what, but I don't have feelings like that for you."

He hadn't been able to forget those words, or

his atonement.

"What's the best game you've played lately?" Shima suddenly asked.

"Huh? What?"

"Game," Shima repeated. "You play video games, right?"

"I-I do, but..." Hikaru stammered.

"Weren't there any good ones you've played lately?" Shima probed.

"Yes," Hikaru said.

The question and answer continued from that.

"Was it a rental or yours?"

"Mine."

"Do you have a strategy guide for it?"

"Yes, but..."

"Okay, sneak the game and the book in to school tomorrow for me."

"What?"

But isn't that against the rules?

"There won't be any gate checks tomorrow."

"Sensei."

"What?"

"I'll lend you the game, but do you have a console?" Had Hikaru seen any in Shima's apartment?

"I have a Playstation," Shima answered.

"This is for Game Boy," said Hikaru.

Shima was silent for a moment.

"You're not a grade-schooler, you know."

The indignant sound of Shima's voice was unbelievably cute. Hikaru could picture him pouting on the other end of the phone.

"Yeah, I have a Game Boy..." Shima admitted.

"Sensei, there're different kinds of Game Boys...." Hikaru explained. "There's Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance.... But I'm not using mine, and I don't have time to use it anyway, so I'll bring the console and the charger. But all of that would be hard to bring to school, so I'll go home after school and get it...so...can I bring it over to your apartment?"

His knees started to tremble again. Silence answered his question. He immediately regretted asking that.

What if I've really done it?

"I-I'm sorry, I..." he tried to apologize.

"I have to go to a welcoming party tomorrow," interrupted Shima.

"Huh? What?"

"A party," Shima repeated. "We got new employees this year, right? We're throwing a welcoming party for them at the bar near the train station. So I might be home late tomorrow."

Whew, he's not mad.

"O-okay," Hikaru stuttered. "I'll sneak it in tomorrow at school."

"On Saturday I can come home in the evening..." Shima proposed.

"Sensei?"

Saturday?

"Can you come then, Umino?" Shima asked.

He nodded emphatically and said, "Yes!"

In the small public bathroom of the bar where the party for the new employees was being held, Shima was washing his hands when suddenly the door swung open, and he was forced inside a stall.

"W-what are you doing? Watch it, Amamiya!" Shima yelled.

"How did you know it was me?" Amamiya smiled, closing the door behind him.

"I can tell by your smell," Shima snapped. "You're the only one I know who drowns himself in expensive cologne when you go to parties."

"Well, I'm honored you could recognize me by smell," Amamiya said as he embraced Shima. His cologne mixed with the smell of alcohol, and Shima could tell he was totally drunk. "Shima...Shima..."

"Get off, Amamiya," Shima protested. "What are you doing?"

Cheerful music played over the speakers in the bathroom. Even if he yelled for help, no one would be able to hear him.

"Hey, Shima. Let's get back together," Amamiya urged.

"I already told you no," Shima said.

"I love you, Shima."

"You're drunk!" Shima yelled. Amamiya hugged him tightly, and one arm slid down to undo Shima's pants. "Don't be stupid!"

"If you won't take me seriously, I'll give you proof that I am!" Amamiya said drunkenly as he slid his fingers into Shima's underwear.

"Get off me!" Shima screamed.

Shima pushed Amamiya away with all his strength, and tried to unlock the door, but Amamiya's arms embraced him again. Amamiya pushed him against the wall and kissed him. It was a nostalgic sensation. Everything that had happened 10 years ago came back to him...Amamiya's kiss was still the same.

"A-Amamiya!"

The only thing that was different now was Amamiya's persistence, and that Shima no longer shared the same feelings.

"Stop it, Amamiya."

Even as Amamiya's hand gripped him, Shima felt no emotional urges like he used to.

"Can you feel it, Shima?" Amamiya's breathing became heavy.

"Yes, but I'm not in the mood for that," Shima snapped.

"I'll make you," Amamiya threatened.

The hotter Shima's body became, the colder his emotions felt. He kicked Amamiya in the shin with the toe of his shoe.

"Oooof!" Amamiya huffed.

Seizing the opportunity, Shima escaped the stall. Luckily, no one had been waiting to use the bathroom, and it didn't look like there was anyone in the adjacent stalls.

"Sh-Shima, what are you doing?" Amamiya exclaimed, staring at Shima from inside the stall. "That hurt!"

"If you can use force, so can I!" Shima retorted. "You probably won't remember this because you're

drunk, but once you're sober, we're going to have a serious talk."

Shima fixed his clothes and left the bathroom. As he walked down the long hallway, he knocked his shoulder against the wall, even though he wasn't drunk. His legs trembled.

Whew, that was a close call.

He clenched his fist and tried to regain his composure. Suddenly, his cell phone rang from within his pocket. He was relieved when he looked at the screen. And then he smiled.

Hikaru panted as he climbed the stairs of the pedestrian bridge.

"That was quick." Shima smiled as he looked at his watch.

"Y-yeah, I guess," Hikaru said, panting. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve. "You said you only had half an hour, so I came as fast as I could." He had left his bike at the bottom of the bridge and run the rest of the way.

Shima stared absentmindedly at the cars passing below them and wished he had at least gotten Hikaru a cold drink.

"Is the party over?" Hikaru asked. Standing next to Shima, he noticed that he was slightly taller than his teacher. If anyone saw them together, they would probably have no idea that they were teacher and student.

"Yeah," Shima replied, "but they were saying they wanted to go on to another bar afterwards, but I'm

too tired, so I snuck out."

"Wow, you sounded really old just now," Hikaru said teasingly.

"I'm 10 years older than you, you know. I usually sound old," Shima said with a laugh.

"I-I'm sorry, I didn't mean..." Hikaru faltered.

"Don't worry about it," said Shima. "I'm just stating the truth."

"Sensei...?"

Shima leaned against the railing and gazed at the traffic below. Hikaru gazed at the night sky. He was trying hard not to be restless at the sight of Shima's beautiful profile.

"The night breeze is pretty cold, huh..." Shima whispered.

After waiting a few seconds, so as not to be awkward, Hikaru put an arm around Shima's shoulders.

"Umino...just putting your arm around me doesn't change the cold," Shima said.

"Hm? Oh, I guess not."

But Hikaru didn't relinquish his hold.

"Why are you holding back now?" Shima asked. They had already had sex...he was a strange kid.

Hikaru pulled him closer and Shima's cheek rested on his shoulder. Just the slight touch of their bodies together felt warm.

"This feels like we're really lovers, doesn't it?" Shima remarked.

"Yeah..." Hikaru said with a sigh.

"It's not that bad," Shima whispered. "I guess...Umino, what's that smell?"

"Hm? Do I smell or something?" Hikaru, starting to panic.

"Did you already take a bath?" Shima asked.

"Yeah..." Hikaru answered.

"I like it," Shima suddenly said.

"Like what?" Hikaru asked.

"Nothing. We'll, it's been a half-hour." Shima looked up at Hikaru, who had a bit of disappointment in his eyes, but quickly smiled to hide it.

"Be careful on your way home, Sensei." Hikaru reluctantly let Shima go.

"You, too," Shima replied.

Hikaru wanted to ask why Shima had called him and asked him so frantically to come out this late at night, but he didn't.

"Be careful," Shima added.

"Goodnight, Sensei." Hikaru bowed his head.

"Night." Shima smiled.

Hikaru walked a few steps, and then suddenly turned on his heel and went back to Shima. "Sensei." He embraced him tightly and said, "Sensei, you smell good, too."

His whole face went red. He ran down the pedestrian bridge.

Shima watched as Hikaru hopped on his bike and raced away.

"That's why you have a reputation of being childish, silly," he murmured then smiled. "You could have at least kissed me instead of hugging me."

But it wasn't bad. Hikaru's words, his embrace, and his faint scent made Shima feel comfortable.

"I'm sorry about yesterday. I'm sorry for being rude, but I don't regret it. I love you."

Shima received that short apology in a text message from Amamiya on his way to work.

Does he really feel badly about what he did? Or is he just apologizing to avoid an awkward scene at work?

Shima did feel a sort of sincerity from the message.

"Or maybe I'm just being arrogant?" Shima mused.

He smiled wryly and put his cell phone down on his desk in the staff room.

"Morning, Shima-sensei," Morikawa, said. "What happened after you left last night?"

It was still early, so there weren't many people in the staff room yet. But Shima looked around instinctively and asked cautiously, "What do you mean?"

Morikawa pulled up a chair next to him and sat down, and then brought her face close to his. Shima backed up a bit.

"Don't tell anyone else, but..." she said, lowering her voice.

"Uh-huh..." Shima also lowered his voice.

"That new girl, Takashima-sensei...she's after Amamiya-sensei," Morikawa revealed.

"Seriously?" Shima asked.

"Last night, after the party ended at the first bar, you left, right?" Morikawa continued. "Well, afterwards

Amamiya-sensei left, too. And even though the party was for her, so did Takashima-sensei! She went chasing after Amamiya!"

"Is that what happened?" Shima asked.

"Did you go out with them afterwards?" Morikawa inquired.

"No, I didn't see him after I left." Shima didn't know what Amamiya did after he left.

"Damn," Morikawa said. "If I knew he was with you, I would've felt a lot better."

"You're acting like Amamiya's a kid who misbehaved or something," Shima remarked.

The nurse laughed. "She hasn't even been here a month, but I guess she's a fast mover. The female students are gonna *hate* her."

"Who, Takashima-sensei?" Shima asked. "But you don't know for sure that she chased after Amamiya after he left, right?"

"It's the same thing, either way!" Morikawa pointed out. "What I'm trying to say is, women hate aggressive types like her."

"Oh, is that how it is?" Shima said helplessly.

"She left right in the middle of her own party!" Morikawa grouched. "None of us know her too well. I mean, love is fine, but when it gets to the point that you forget everything else around you, nothing good ever comes out of it. You'd better be careful of that, too!"

"Sorry, but I don't have anything to be careful about," Shima said, smiling wryly.

"What?" Morikawa exclaimed. "But I heard you were engaged. I hadn't heard anything about a woman

before so we were all surprised, but..."

"That was a false rumor, so of course everyone was surprised," Shima said.

"Ohhh..."

"I guess everyone was making something out of nothing," Shima added.

"That's right," Morikawa agreed. "It's so strange, because nobody's ever spread rumors about Amamiya-sensei and I, even though we're really close."

"Do you want there to be rumors like that?" Shima asked.

That would be surprising. She's already a beautiful woman, why would she need Amamiya?

"No," Morikawa answered, "but it would be fun."

She gave a carefree smile, and Shima suddenly understood why the female students often came to her for advice.

"I wish I had a school nurse like you when I was in high school," he said.

"Really? Thanks..." Morikawa trailed off then asked, "That's a compliment, right?"

Shima hadn't had anyone to talk to when he had been in high school. He hadn't known what was right, what was wrong; he hadn't known anything. He had just taken each fact at face value.

He didn't want to get back together with Amamiya. But he realized he had a deep scar on his heart from that time in his life.

"By the way, Shima-sensei, do you know who Amamiya-sensei's ex is?" Morikawa suddenly asked.

Startled, Shima stared at her. "His ex? Um...he has a lot of them. Which one?"

They both smiled.

"I'm not sure, actually," Morikawa said.

"We went to high school together, but we went to different colleges and didn't keep in contact," Shima admitted. "So I don't know what happened with him during that time. And after we both started working here, I think you've been closer to him than me."

Amamiya and the nurse got along well right from the start, and he treated her like an older sister, stopping by the clinic often.

"That's true, but it's just so weird. He told me he's still hung up on his ex!"

Shima was startled once again, but she continued, "It's a good opportunity for him, but I hope they don't get back together."

"Um, why?" Shima laughed uneasily.

"Because he's a really lucky person! He needs to learn that life isn't always fair, don't you think so?" Morikawa said.

It was true that Amamiya was a lucky person—he was willful, hadn't had much conflict in his life, had tons of friends...

"And then he'd go back to normal," Morikawa added. "But I do feel kind of sorry for Takashima-sensei. He wouldn't take her seriously at all. I hope he doesn't use her."

"I know," Shima said, nodding. He glanced at his cell phone on his desk.

"Oh, and don't tell Amamiya-sensei I told you

about how he's still hung up on his ex." Morikawa smiled playfully.

After she left, Shima looked once again at his cell phone.

"I don't have a good feeling about this..."

He knew they could never get back together, because they'd just make the same mistakes all over again. He picked up his cell phone and erased the messages from Amamiya.

Students walked out of the school building with relieved looks on their faces as final exams ended and summer vacation began. Hikaru was watching them from a window of the hallway, when he saw a group of his friends coming near him. One of the girls grabbed Hikaru's arm flirtatiously, and brought her face close to his.

"Let's go to the beach, Hikaru!" she squealed. "It's such a waste for you to spend all your time at school! This is the last summer vacation of high school!"

"Hmm...the beach does sound nice..." Hikaru mumbled. He didn't hate swimming, and he loved playing underneath the sun.

"Yeah, it'll be a lot more fun if you come along, Hikaru!" the girl said, looking up at him.

"Yeah, I bet he's good at volleyball!" one of their friends said.

"Ohh, I wanna see him play volleyball!" the girl gushed. "Let's do it, let's do it!"

But Hikaru's mind was somewhere else.

It was inside a fantasy.

If only I could spend time with Shima-sensei, under the sun...

His friend's voice intruded into his dream. "Last time we did it, he ended up whacking...what was it again? Hey, are you listening, Hikaru?"

"...Huh?" Hikaru asked.

"What did you end up hitting that time?" his friend prompted.

"Huh? I don't remember," Hikaru replied.

"That sounds soooo fun!" the girl squealed. "Let's go next weekend, okay?"

Hikaru looked at her smiling face suspiciously.

"Let's invite Shima-sensei, too!" one of his friends suggested abruptly.

Hikaru was startled. He'd never seen his friend interacting with Shima before.

"Kyaa! Let's do it, let's do it! I want Shima-sensei to come, too! But why did you suggest it all of a sudden?" another girl asked curiously.

"Oh, I heard he's buying a car!" Hikaru's friend revealed.

"Does he even have a license?" one of the girls asked.

"Are you sure this isn't a false rumor like how he was supposedly engaged?" another friend asked.

"Yeah!" a girl chimed. "I was totally shocked when I heard that one. I'm so glad it wasn't true."

"No, this one is for real," the informant said. "One of my friends works at a car dealership and he said Shima-sensei went there looking for a car."

"Ohh, is he gonna get a new car?" the girls asked.

"I get shotgun!" a classmate proclaimed.

"Why? I think a girl should be in the passenger seat, right?" one of the girls protested.

"Yeah, Shima-sensei would have a lot more fun that way!" the other girl agreed.

Hikaru's heart pounded as he listened to his excited friends chatter away and plan something they didn't even know would happen.

Going to the beach with Shima-sensei, huh...that would be fun, but troublesome...

Just then, his cell phone rang. He took it out of his pocket and said, "Oh, sorry." He looked at the screen and shook the girl's arm off and walked away.

"Hello?"

"What are you doing? Aren't you studying for entrance exams this year?" a voice said coolly.

Hikaru's heart skipped a beat.

"Um, what do you mean?" he asked.

"Where are you right now?" Shima demanded.

"Across from the bike rack..." Hikaru answered.

"Are you going home?" Shima asked.

"No, I—" Hikaru began.

"Just because tests are over doesn't mean you can get carried away," Shima interrupted.

"I'm not," Hikaru protested.

"Really?"

Click.

"Huh?" Hikaru looked at his cell phone,

dumbfounded. He wasn't sure why Shima had hung up on him so suddenly. For that matter, he didn't even know why Shima had called him. He looked up Shima's number and called him back.

Shima picked up right away.

"What?" He sounded crabby.

"That's what I want to know!"

What was going on?

"Sensei, where are you right now?" he asked in a quieter voice.

"I dunno," Shima answered childishly.

"Come on, tell me!" Hikaru urged.

"Go home, Umino," Shima said.

"I don't want to! Come on, tell me!" Hikaru demanded.

"The roof," Shima said, and hung up again.

"The roof? Which one?" Hikaru muttered.

There were many buildings that made up their school. There were at least five separate roofs. He was about to call Shima again to figure out which roof he was on, but he noticed his battery was almost dead. He went over to his friends and said, "Sorry, I gotta go," and then hurriedly went back inside the school building.

"Oh, man! He left again!" one of the girls whispered disappointedly, and the rest of his friends just shrugged their shoulders as they offered their own opinions.

"He's so oblivious."

"He's so naïve."

"Even if you get him to like you back, he's so naïve you'd be in for future trouble."

"Don't you think he's gotten a bit more masculine lately, though?"

"Really? I think he's pretty much the same."

"His grades are going up."

"Yeah, it's like he's a different person. He's studying really hard lately."

"That studious lifestyle looks kinda fun."

"Are you crazy? Anything's more fun than studying!"

"Yeah, I guess you're right. But he really looks like he's having a great time doing it!"

Hikaru panted as he raced up the steps and said, "This is the last one..."

He opened the door to the roof and stepped out. He looked around, but didn't see anyone. He sighed, and lost all hope.

"He's not here..." He took out his cell phone and gave it a try. "Hey, it's going through..."

He heard another sound nearby. He looked around once more, and saw Shima behind a post, sitting on the ground with his back facing him. His cell phone was next to him.

"Sensei...?"

Hikaru peeked over Shima's shoulder and saw his Game Boy in Shima's hands.

"Geh! You're still playing that?" It had been more than two months since he had lent it. "You're slow!"

"Shut up!" Shima snapped. "I'm a busy man,

unlike you! I don't have time to just be playing games all the time."

"I gave you the strategy guide and everything..." Hikaru mumbled.

Shima ignored him. "Okay, I have to go back to the staff room."

"What?" Hikaru exclaimed.

Shima stood up and Hikaru continued, "Wait! Why did you call me?"

"I'm waiting to see your test scores," Shima said. "Well, my break's over, gotta get back to work!"

"Didn't you want to tell me something?" Hikaru grabbed Shima's arm.

"Not really," Shima answered.

"Then why did you call me? Why'd you hang up on me like that? What's wrong? I'm really worried about you!" Hikaru tightened his grip on Shima's arms.

Shima stared up at the sweat on Hikaru's forehead. He stared at the way Hikaru's white shirt clung to his body with sweat.

"I'm sorry I made you worry," he suddenly whispered, and Hikaru embraced him. He put his forehead against Hikaru's shoulder. "You smell like sweat, Umino..."

"Ah, I'm sorry..." Hikaru turned red and tried to pull away, but Shima gently held him close.

"I didn't say I didn't like it."

"Sensei..."

"This is what you really smell like..." Shima whispered.

"Hmm?"



"Nothing..."

It wasn't the scent of soap, it was Hikaru Umino's scent.

"Sensei."

Hikaru wanted to kiss him. Shima looked up slowly, slightly parting his lips. Hikaru didn't hesitate, and plunged his tongue into his mouth.

"Ahh...more, Umino...go deeper, deeper!"

The two of them panted together. It was the weekend, and they were both on top of Shima's bed.

"Sensei...I can't take it anymore!"

Hikaru moaned as he thrust into Shima over and over again.

Ever since he let him borrow the Game Boy two months ago, he had been spending the night at Shima's house every Saturday night. He had told his mother that he and some friends from summer school were having study sessions every Saturday night, so that was how he had gotten permission. Of course that was a lie, but Hikaru was still studying properly. Well, Shima was *making* him study. Shima never helped him (he had said just because he was a teacher that didn't mean he wanted to be a tutor after school), but Shima had given him a lot of study materials. And if Hikaru didn't reach a certain goal, Shima wouldn't allow sex with him.

Hikaru wanted to see Shima every day. He wanted to touch him all the time. He couldn't stand it anymore.

After they were done, Hikaru embraced him as

tightly as he could.

"That hurts, Umino!" Shima protested.

"Oh, yeah. Sensei, are you going to buy a car?" Hikaru asked, easing his hold a bit.

"Huh? Who told you that?" Shima asked.

"Some girls told me the other day," Hikaru admitted. "They said you were getting a new car, and that they'd ask you to take them to school."

"No one's buying a *new* car," Shima laughed.

"Then you really are buying a car?" Hikaru inquired. "Do you have your license, Sensei?"

"Yeah," Shima answered.

Hikaru hesitated before asking, "...Are you a good driver?"

"That's pretty rude!" Shima admonished. "I haven't driven for a while, but it's not like I'm terrible at it."

"But just thinking about you maybe getting in an accident scares the crap out of me," Hikaru said.

"If you're that worried, then why don't you come along with me?" Shima proposed.

"What? Wow, that would be awesome," Hikaru gushed, then asked, "But isn't it against school rules?"

"I won't use it to drive to school," Shima said quietly.

Hikaru stared blankly at Shima. "Then why are you buying a car?"

"I'm tired of worrying about what time the trains come when I go out," Shima said, almost flippantly.

"When you go out?" Hikaru parroted.

"After you got good grades on your midterms, I

took you out for a reward, right?" Shima asked.

"Yeah," Hikaru answered cautiously.

"And we've gone out together a few times after that, too," Shima went on.

"Yeah," Hikaru replied, then a thought hit him.

"What! Does that mean...does that mean you bought it to use for our dates?!"

Awesome!

"I'm not buying it for you," Shima said firmly.

"I'm buying it to make things easier on me."

Oh, I guess he is buying it so he doesn't have to worry about the trains.

When they went out on dates they would use public transportation like trains and busses. It hadn't been a big deal to Hikaru, but he supposed it had been annoying to Shima, who wasn't used to taking trains anymore. There were the time limitations, and way too many people. Also, there was the constant worry of seeing someone else they knew at any nearby train stations.

"Well, whatever. But that's awesome! I can't believe I'll get to ride around in your car during summer vacation!" Hikaru leaned over and kissed Shima, who hadn't expected him to be so happy. He didn't know he could *be* this happy. "I love you, Sensei!"

Shima answered Hikaru's eager kisses.

"I love you, Sensei."

Shima couldn't return the words, so instead, he entwined his tongue with Hikaru's.

"I heard you're buying a car?" Amamiya asked Shima one day in the staff room. He was not smiling. "I guess more false rumors are spreading about you, like the engagement one."

Amamiya had known the truth about that one without having to ask Shima himself. And even if it had been true, he wouldn't have cared at that point.

"Guess so," Shima said.

Shima knew everyone was talking about it. But why had Amamiya come all the way here to confirm it? Their female co-workers perked up, listening in on their conversation. Taking notice of this, Amamiya led Shima out of the room. They walked aimlessly around the school as they talked.

"Are you going on a long trip during summer vacation or something?" Amamiya asked. "I guess those who aren't in charge of third years have a lot of free time."

Shima silently stared up at Amamiya, who cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry, I'm not trying to be a jerk," Amamiya said. He looked down. "But, before, you said you didn't like driving because it strained your eyes, so I wondered what changed." He didn't understand why Shima could possibly need a car.

"Why are you being so nosy about a car?" Shima asked with a wry smile.

"It's not just about the car," Amamiya said, frustrated. "I just want to know the reason."

"Amamiya..."

They hadn't spoken since his text message

apology, so Shima had thought everything was settled.

"I don't mean to sound like a broken record, Shima, but could you seriously consider going out with me again?" Amamiya asked.

"I already told you, no," was the immediate answer.

"So you do have a lover," Amamiya accused.

"No, I don't," Shima said.

"Then do you have someone you're in love with?" Amamiya probed.

Shima cast a sidelong glance at Amamiya and said, "Even if I did, I'm not obligated to tell you."

"Why can't you just consider it, Shima?" Amamiya asked.

"Are you out of your mind, Amamiya?" Shima asked back.

"I'm completely calm," Amamiya said.

"I don't know about that," Shima muttered. "I don't think so. We'd only make the same mistakes we did back then. People don't change that easily. Because I know I haven't changed since then. So I'd just do the same things I did then. Could you really put up with that? Could you really not be burdened by me again?"

"It's been 10 years, Shima," Amamiya reasoned out. "We won't know if it'll be the same or different unless we try."

"Anyway, it's not like I don't like you," Shima told him. "But, it doesn't extend beyond that."

Amamiya sighed deeply and said, "Damn it." He crossed his arms. "It's like we've gone back 10 years. I had to persuade you the exact same way to go out with

me back then."

"Well, I don't want to make the same mistake twice," Shima repeated. "Amamiya, don't you always say you want to live for new love? Then why are you still stopped here?"

"I'm walking!" Amamiya cried out.

"It was a figure of speech," Shima said.

Stupid.

Shima glared at Amamiya, who smiled broadly.

"I ain't letting it go this easily."

"Better watch your grammar, Amamiya-sensei," Shima said teasingly, and Amamiya sighed again.

"It's your fault because you're so beautiful," Amamiya complained softly yet stubbornly as he watched Shima walk away.

But he would never admit to Shima's face that he thought he was still beautiful. Shima had always been an important presence in his life. Maybe it was just Amamiya's own bias for being in love with him.

"The engagement rumor was false, but every day you get more beautiful...and now you're buying a car. I can't help being suspicious..." He couldn't stand the thought of someone else being with Shima.

"Hey, Shima...who are you in love with?"

Chapter Two

"This is pretty unusual!"

The restaurant was decorated extravagantly with green, red and gold for Christmas. Chihaya Morikawa wore a gorgeous dress and smiled as she drank from a glass of white wine. "The sommelier was right, this wine is delicious!"

"Is it that unusual for you to get invited out on Christmas Eve, Morikawa-sensei?" Amamiya, wearing a stylish suit, smiled from across the flickering candlelight.

"Well, I guess if you invited me out for Christmas Eve that means you never got back together with your ex?" Morikawa commented.

"You're right about that one." Amamiya shrugged his shoulders. "They're totally stubborn."

"What a formidable enemy," Morikawa admired. "So you figured you'd just invite me?"

"I don't mean I gave in," Amamiya explained. "Just the opposite. But I just wanted to invite someone out on Christmas Eve."

"Would it have been so terrible to be alone?" Morikawa asked.

"Yes."

It would be pretty lonely to spend a night like this alone.

"So I should be honored that I'm the one you chose?" Morikawa teased.

"I would be honored if you're honored," Amamiya shot back.

Morikawa giggled. "I wonder who your stubborn ex is spending the night with?"

"Who knows..." Amamiya didn't know what Shima was doing that night, nor did he try to find out. He looked out the window at the gorgeous night scenery.

"Don't tell me they're so stubborn that you've actually given up?" Morikawa asked.

"Who knows..."

Amamiya downed the rest of his wine with a vague smile.

Hikaru was grateful that even in the middle of winter it hadn't snowed much, so he and Shima could take a drive on New Year's Eve together.

"Sensei, they didn't have any meat buns left," Hikaru said as he opened the passenger-side door of Shima's car, a plastic bag from a convenience store in hand.

It was only natural that on a busy day like New Year's Eve, even the parking lot at the convenience store was packed, so they had had to park on the side of the road while Shima waited with the engine on.

Hikaru fastened his seat belt and continued, "They didn't have the meat buns you usually eat, but they did have the deluxe kind. Maybe it just would have been cheaper to get pizza?"

He handed Shima the change, and Shima smiled at him, amused by the serious look on his face. High school students nowadays usually didn't concern themselves with the cost of things.

"It's okay," Shima said. "It's not like it's that much more expensive."

"What? It's 500 yen more!" Hikaru cried out.

Shima laughed.

"This isn't a laughing matter!" Hikaru said, looking even more serious as he placed their drinks in the cup holders. He put the black coffee on Shima's side and the sports drink on his side. "If you wanna eat now, I'll un-wrap them."

"Okay."

Shima turned on his blinker and checked the rearview mirror, preparing to pull back out onto the road.

"Ah, watch out for that bike behind you, Sensei. It doesn't have its headlights on," Hikaru warned.

He was actually a great navigator. In the past six months, Hikaru had learned how to be an expert passenger. He was an intelligent person, so maybe that was to be expected, but when Shima had Hikaru along with him in the car, it made things a lot easier. After the bike passed, Shima pulled back out onto the road.

After winter vacation was over, it would finally be the last semester, and then the critical time of college entrance exams. Therefore, Shima hadn't let Hikaru see him once during the break. Not on Christmas Eve, nor on Christmas. Instead, he had proposed taking a drive to see the first sunrise of the New Year. Usually, Hikaru

spent New Year's Eve out all night with his friends, so his parents weren't suspicious at all when he left. Hikaru was thrilled at Shima's kindness.

If Hikaru had been in school, he would have been able to see Shima more often, but since Shima had ordered him to study, Hikaru obeyed him and studied for the entrance exams without complaining once.

Before they watched the first sunrise, they stopped by a small temple far away from where they lived to offer prayers for the New Year. Hikaru clapped his hands together and prayed as he stole glances at Shima's beautiful profile.

Finally, it was New Year's Day. That meant Hikaru's exam would be coming up before he knew it, so he wouldn't have another opportunity to spend time alone like this with Shima again. Shima would never allow it, and Hikaru himself wouldn't have time for it. And then, after Hikaru graduated, he would never be able to see Shima again. Not only would their game of make-believe lovers end, but he would graduate from high school and wouldn't be able to see Shima at all.

Hikaru loved Shima so much, and even though they were alone together now, and even though Shima had been so nice to him, and even though at that moment they felt like actual lovers, it was a game of make-believe. It wasn't real. And there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Hikaru felt his throat tighten, and he quickly looked away. He loved Shima. He loved him so much. He should have been praying to pass his entrance exams, but when he had held his hands together at the temple,

the only thing going through his mind was Shima.

With the car stopped on the side of a deserted mountain road, during the first sunrise of the New Year, Hikaru silently prayed, *I don't want to be apart from him. Please don't let Shima-sensei and I part.*

But Hikaru wasn't watching the sunrise. He was making love to Shima with the seat down, and he knew the sun had risen when the first rays of sunlight filtered through the car window.

This might be the last time. The last time I make love to Shima-sensei. I just have a feeling.

"Umino," Shima said painfully, but Hikaru didn't let up. "...Umino."

Hikaru might never hear Shima pant like that again. He might never hear Shima call his name like that again.

Hikaru had been exactly right. Once the last semester started, he lost all of his spare time. Attendance at school ceased being mandatory, so he didn't even go much. Every time he thought of his entrance exams, his stomach hurt. He only thought of Shima in bed, right before going to sleep. When he thought of him it was almost too much to bear, but Shima had forbidden him from calling his cell phone, so he'd send him text messages. But no responses ever came. Every day ended like that.

Hikaru's entrance exams came and went, and luckily he passed them in perfect form. But each day that passed brought him nearer to graduation, and his

friends didn't understand why he was so gloomy. There was only one reason for that. Even though his entrance exams were over, Shima still would not see Hikaru. He was still forbidden to call his teacher's cell phone.

Things continued like that, and his graduation came up soon. After he graduated, their game of make-believe lovers would definitely be over. He knew he couldn't be selfish. After all, he had stolen all of Shima's free time for the past year. But, even though he knew this, he just wanted to be selfish one last time.

He sent Shima a text message: "You said before that if I passed my entrance exams you'd give me a present. Did you forget? I know what I want, so please call me."

When Shima had brought him home on New Year's Day, he had indeed said, "If you get into college, I'll give you a present. What do you want?"

At the time, Hikaru couldn't tell him the truth. That what he really wanted was to be with Shima forever. That was all he wanted, but that was also the one thing he couldn't ask for.

He had said, "There's not really anything I want right now. And if I think too much about it, I might fail! So I'll think about it after I pass, okay?"

Shima finally replied with a text message and they arranged to meet on the roof during Shima's break.

"If you don't tell me what you want, how do you expect me to give it to you now?" Shima said, laughing.

Hikaru smiled. "It's okay. I want the watch you always wear."

"Huh? It's a pretty old one. Are you sure this is

what you want?" Shima asked, surprised.

"It's your favorite one, isn't it?" Hikaru asked.

Shima had gone out with him just for pretend, but he really loved his watch, so much so that he continued to wear it despite it being worn out.

"You're such a weirdo," Shima said, handing the watch over to Hikaru. "Congratulations on your exam, Umio."

"Thanks, Sensei."

No matter how worn out it was, it was going to be Hikaru's treasure. Shima had given Hikaru his favorite watch that he had loved for so many years. It was proof of the time they spent together.

"But Sensei..." Hikaru continued. "I wasn't able to atone for what I did to you after all."

"Atone?" Shima asked, confused.

"You were the one who first said it, remember?" Hikaru reminded him.

After Hikaru had attacked him that day, Shima had suggested the game of make-believe lovers as his atonement.

"Oh, yeah." Shima nodded and smiled again, looking away from Hikaru. "That's okay. The statute of limitations has passed."

Hesitating, Hikaru said, "...Okay."

"See ya, Umio."

Hikaru desperately grabbed Shima's arm.

"Sensei." He embraced him, and placed small kisses on his cheeks.

"Stop it, Umio, we're at school."

Shima pushed against Hikaru's chest, and

Hikaru slowly let go of him. Hikaru wanted to kiss him on the lips, but now it was impossible. Hikaru bowed to Shima and then ran off as fast as he could.

Hikaru's graduation ceremony was over. He held his diploma in his hand.

Shima told him, smiling, "Just because you got into a good college doesn't mean you can just play around now! Make sure you study."

In a few minutes, other students crowded around the popular Shima-sensei, and eventually he disappeared into the school building.

Their game of make-believe lovers was over.

"He let it end so easily..." Hikaru murmured.

He thought he might cry, but he had been able to smile in front of Shima. And Shima had just acted like a regular, kind teacher.

"I'm sure he's relieved to be free of his burden," Hikaru continued.

Shima's face had looked relieved as he said goodbye to Hikaru.

"What's wrong with me?" Hikaru chided himself.

Why was he about to cry now? He'd wanted to show Shima these tears. His heart felt like it would burst open, it was so painful.



Chapter Three

“Shima, I found a really good Japanese restaurant. Wanna go there tonight and have a drink?” Amamiya asked casually.

He didn’t have a reason to say no, so Shima said, “Tonight? Okay, that’s fine.”

He had accepted just as casually. But actually, ever since the new semester had started, Amamiya had been worried about Shima. His co-teacher had lost a lot of weight.

Even during dinner that night, Shima seemed really out of it, and Amamiya wondered if the other man was just tired.

“Are things going that bad with your boyfriend?” he asked.

“Hmm?” Shima said without interest.

Amamiya took a deep breath then said, “Well, he’s graduated, so now you two can date out in the open, so what are you so worried about?”

Shima was dumbfounded. “Amamiya?”

Amamiya smirked. “What? I’m not dumb, you know. I know you’re going out with someone from our school who just graduated, right?”

Shima propped his elbows up on the table, put his chin in his hand and sighed hopelessly.

“Does everyone know?”

They had tried to hide it so desperately.

"Of course not." Amamiya laughed lightly, and said, "No one else knows. But I'm your ex, so I can see things others can't."

"How long have you known?" Shima inquired.

"A really long time," Amamiya said mysteriously.

"So you knew this whole time and never said anything?" Shima demanded.

Amamiya nodded. "Yeah."

"Why?"

"I dunno," Amamiya answered with a shrug. "Maybe I just wanted to see how things went. And it's not like anything would happen if I did say anything. Maybe I was waiting until things cooled off with him so I could snatch you away at just the right time."

Shima sighed again, not knowing if Amamiya was joking or being serious.

"And anyway," Amamiya continued, "if I interfered and everyone found out about it, you would have gotten fired, right? And then we would be apart, so that would be pointless. So that didn't happen...or no, maybe it was to apologize for dumping you so unreasonably back then."

"What are you talking about?" Shima finally smiled.

Amamiya smiled back. "I really wanted to interfere. But I just couldn't. I guess I loved you enough to want you to be happy."

It made him jealous to see his former lover so happy with someone else, but it wasn't just that.

"Your grammar is so terrible." Shima laughed.

Satisfied with this, Amamiya continued cautiously, "I won't ask who it is, but how long have you been with him?"

There was no response.

"I said, how long have you been with him?" Amamiya repeated. "Were you with him during the time when I was using your bath?"

Shima had changed around that time.

"We weren't together then." Shima had had no intention of going out with Hikaru at that time.

"So if I would have stayed with you that day and tried to make love to you, would you still have said no to me?" Amamiya asked.

That day, after school in the staff room when he had tried to invite Shima out, there was something about Shima that looked like he had just made love with someone. It had made Amamiya burn with lust.

"I...don't know," Shima hesitantly replied. He didn't know what he would've done on that day. "I might not have turned you away."

He hadn't thought of starting things with Hikaru at that time, but if he had been forced, he might have started to think about Amamiya seriously again.

"What!" Amamiya looked disappointed, and fell back into his chair with a thump. "I should have totally screwed you that day! Then I would have been able to get you back. Damn it, I failed!"

"It might not be too late," Shima whispered.

Amamiya opened his eyes wide in surprise.

"What did you say?"

"I'm not with anyone right now," said Shima. "He and I only went out for a little while. We're not together anymore. He doesn't mean anything to me anymore. So I'm free. I'm not hung up on him like I was with you."

"Shima..."

"It's okay, Amamiya. Let's get back together." Shima smiled easily.

"Hey, you're going to the cultural festival this weekend, right?" a friend asked Hikaru before the lecture started.

Hikaru stared blankly. "The cultural festival?" Which one?

"Hey, hey! The cultural festival at your old high school!" his friend replied.

"Huh?" All of a sudden, someone's face flashed through Hikaru's mind. It was painful.

"No, I..."

"Time flies, doesn't it?" his friend continued. "It's already been six months since we graduated! Let's meet in front of the train station, okay? Everyone else is coming, so make sure you're there!"

"No, I'll pass..." Hikaru mumbled.

"What? Why?" his friend asked incredulously.

Another voice overlapped with his friend's, saying, "What? Why not?"

It was Hikaru's girlfriend, Tsukasa Katayama. They weren't formally going out, but they were having sex. But, to him, it just didn't feel like they were dating.

"Isn't that where you went to in high school?" Tsukasa asked.

He knew what she wasn't saying.

"Isn't that the school where all the rich kids go?" Maybe she wanted to get the ever-popular "younger boyfriend."

"I wanna see where you went to in high school, Hikaru-kun!" she urged. "Hey, let's go, okay?"

"Come on, even Tsukasa is looking forward to it," his friend chimed in. "It's a good opportunity to show off to everyone else how you got such a cute girlfriend so soon after starting college!"

Tsukasa jumped in. "Hikaru, will you introduce me to all your friends?"

There was no way he could say no now, and they eventually all coerced him into going to the cultural festival.

Finally, the day of the festival came, and he felt extremely conflicted. He hadn't had any contact with Shima since graduation. Shima had changed his cell phone number, and when Hikaru had sent him a postcard updating him on his life at college, all he had received was an overly formal response like any teacher would send a former student. Hikaru didn't send him anymore postcards after that. Shima's postcard had implicitly said, "We're over. Just move on."

The scars from their break-up hadn't yet healed. Hikaru wasn't ready to see Shima's face.

One of his friends spotted Shima in the hallway. "Hmm? Doesn't it look like Shima-sensei lost a lot of weight? Maybe he's with someone now. What do you

think, Hikaru?" he asked innocently.

Hikaru didn't answer.

Shima did look thinner. He was surrounded by students, popular as always. Hikaru wondered if there was someone among them that Shima was seriously in love with. He wondered if Shima had moved on already. Just thinking of those things was painful for Hikaru. He was still in love with Shima. Even though their game of make-believe lovers was over, and even though he had been working so hard these past six months, he couldn't bring an end to his feelings for Shima.

"Shima-sensei!" His friends ran up to Shima in the hallway. Hikaru trailed behind them.

"Long time no see! How is everyone?"

They all exchanged friendly greetings, and then went off one by one. Finally, Shima's gaze settled on Hikaru. At that moment, a troubled expression passed over Shima's face, which strengthened Hikaru's resolve. He bowed his head and then left. He wasn't running away. But he had become a little more of an adult, so he couldn't be near Shima.

"Hey, Umino!"

Hikaru was passing through the courtyard when Amamiya called out to him. His old teacher was sitting by the window of the staff room, smoking a cigarette.

"Ah, good afternoon." Hikaru walked across the lawn and leaned against the window frame.

Amamiya smiled and said teasingly, "You look a little more grown up, huh?"

"You never change, do you, Sensei?" Hikaru retorted.

Amamiya looked healthy and cheerful as always.

"I'm not a high school student! It's not like I'm gonna change that much at my age." Hikaru had meant it as a compliment, but Amamiya took it as a stab at his age. "Have you seen Shima yet?"

Amamiya knew that Shima hadn't been in charge of Hikaru's grade, nor had he taught him in any class ever. It wasn't normal to go speak to a teacher you didn't have any kind of relationship with. So why was Amamiya asking Hikaru this? Then it came to Hikaru. Amamiya knew.

"From far away," Hikaru mumbled.

"From far away?" Amamiya asked, surprised. "What are you thinking? Isn't he why you came to this festival?"

"N-no, that's not why I came," Hikaru quickly denied.

"Really." Amamiya gave a meaningful smile, and then suddenly made a serious face. "He's lost weight, hasn't he?"

"He has," Hikaru agreed.

He hoped that a new relationship wasn't the cause for it. But it was none of his business. What Shima did was no longer any of his business.

"You guys are close, huh?" he couldn't help asking.

He wondered if Shima had told Amamiya about them. That must be the reason. They were close enough

to use each other's baths, after all.

"Well, he's my ex," Amamiya divulged.

"I see."

He knew it. Hikaru nodded and remained silent.

"That's a pretty quiet reaction," Amamiya remarked. "Aren't you surprised, Umino?"

"I had suspected it," Hikaru admitted.

"Hmm," Amamiya said noncommittally.

But even if Amamiya was Shima's ex, Shima had gone out with him because Shima loved him. They had been actual lovers. He hadn't forced Shima to go out with him like Hikaru had, in essence, done. That made Hikaru unbelievably jealous. And on top of that, even after they had broken up, Amamiya got to work at the same place as Shima.

"Damn. That was going to be my bombshell announcement. Aren't you worried about Shima?" Amamiya asked lightly. He lowered his voice. "Is it over?"

"Is what over?" Hikaru asked.

"You secretly dated Shima, didn't you?" Amamiya asked.

"No, I didn't," Hikaru quickly denied. "It was a one-sided thing. All I did was drag him into it."

He couldn't call that dating.

"That's not true," Amamiya said seriously. "He loved you, too."

"What?!" Hikaru squawked.

After getting over his shock, he figured Amamiya was just teasing him, and looked at his teacher suspiciously.

Amamiya laughed. "I finally surprised you." He was extraordinarily satisfied.

"Did you tell me that joke just to surprise me? It wasn't very funny, Sensei," Hikaru grumbled.

"It's not a joke," Amamiya denied. "He sold that car before he even had it for a whole year. It's so easy to see through him."

"What? Shima-sensei sold his car?" Hikaru asked.

"About two or three months after you graduated," Amamiya told him. "He said he didn't use it very much, and keeping it was too expensive."

"H-he should have used it for his dates," Hikaru said.

Amamiya hadn't exactly said that he and Shima weren't going out now. After all, they had gone out before and they remained so close.

"Ha," Amamiya scoffed. "You're forcing yourself."

"I am not," Hikaru said stubbornly.

"You're right. He's the one that's been forcing himself this whole time." Amamiya inhaled his cigarette deeply, and then exhaled a narrow line of smoke. "He's been spacey ever since you graduated. He hasn't eaten much."

Shima was almost too painful to watch.

"I don't understand!" Hikaru didn't know where Amamiya was going with this.

"I don't really understand, either," Amamiya whispered as he remembered that important conversation.

"It might not be too late," Shima whispered.

Amamiya opened his eyes wide in surprise.

"What did you say?"

"I'm not with anyone right now," said Shima.

"He and I only went out for a little while. We're not together anymore. He doesn't mean anything to me anymore. So I'm free. I'm not hung up on him like I was with you."

"Shima . . ."

"It's okay, Amamiya. Let's get back together."

Shima smiled easily.

Amamiya could see that Shima was in denial. He could tell the signs of desperation and exhaustion. If Shima wasn't hung up on his recent boyfriend, why would he be acting like this?

"Are you sure?" Amamiya asked cautiously. "I won't hold back this time."

He meant it as a threat, but Shima kept smiling.

"I'm sure," Shima answered. He looked down as said this. It looked like he did that not to be inviting, but to avoid looking at something.

It was true that Amamiya was torn at first, but he couldn't do it. He knew that Shima was still in love with another man, and in order to forget the guy Shima was trying to use Amamiya. Amamiya couldn't be happy about that. He imagined Shima calling out another man's name while in his arms, and it hurt his pride just thinking about it. But he still wanted to make love to Shima.

"Um, listen, Shima..." Amamiya said hesitantly.

"Just kidding!" Shima looked up suddenly and laughed. "Don't look so serious, Amamiya! I'm just being mean to you!"

"Shima...?" Amamiya said, shocked.

"You gave Morikawa-sensei a ring for her birthday, didn't you?" Shima asked.

"What?" Amamiya exclaimed. "H-how did you know that, Shima?"

Shima laughed. "Morikawa-sensei said it was a pity that it wasn't an engagement ring."

"It was supposed to be a secret!" Amamiya cried out.

"It still is," said Shima. "She hasn't told anyone other than me."

Amamiya's eyes narrowed as he looked at Shima.

"Ah! That means that..."

"The reason she told me is because she suspected I was the ex that you always talk about!" Shima divulged.

"Oh, man..." Amamiya grumbled.

"So in other words, it's time to pay the piper, Amamiya," Shima continued. "If you're gonna marry a smart woman like her, you can't play around anymore!"

"Y-you knew that and still teased me!" Amamiya complained.

That's what this was about!

"Think of it as revenge," Shima said teasingly, smiling. "So let's allow what happened between us before go, okay? Let's just start over."

Amamiya shook his head to dispel the memories.

"I don't really understand what Shima is thinking, either. But you might be the only one in this world who can find out the truth."

The truth?

Hikaru hesitantly asked, "...What does that mean?"

"You love him, and he loves you, so why aren't you together now?" Amamiya asked. "He's the only one who knows the reason, and you're the only one who has the right to know that reason."

"I don't have any right to know!" Hikaru denied hotly.

"Yes, you do," Amamiya countered. "I tried to find out, but, unfortunately, Shima is a really stubborn person. So I don't think he'll tell me the truth."

Shima had evaded the truth many times.

"But Shima-sensei doesn't care about me at all," Hikaru whispered.

"Believe what you want," Amamiya scoffed.

"Aren't you the one in love with him?" Hikaru accused. "So why are you telling me all this? It's weird!"

"That's actually a misunderstanding," Amamiya told him. "Actually, I'm the kind of man who's always searching for a new love. You can ask him yourself if you don't believe me. I don't have any feelings for Shima anymore. There's just no point in it anymore."

Hikaru was overly cautious about trusting what

Amamiya was saying. Shima loved him? He couldn't believe that so easily. No matter what Amamiya said, the only thing that seemed to be the truth was the disturbed look on Shima's face the moment he had seen Hikaru.

Leaving behind the hustle and bustle of the festival, Hikaru went to a corner of a school building.

"This brings back memories..." he murmured.

He was looking at the Social Studies room. The one he had called Shima to that day. The door was always left unlocked. He had thought since it was a festival that it would be locked up, but the door opened when he tried the knob.

"Looks the same," he said as he went inside and closed the door behind him.

The classroom was as dusty as always. Hikaru's eyes narrowed as he recalled all the nostalgic moments, all the painful moments...there was the desk he had pushed Shima down on.

Just then, he heard footsteps out in the hallway. They stopped outside the door.

"Crap, if someone finds out I'm in here without permission, I'll get in trouble!" he thought.

Even though he had graduated from there, he wasn't a currently enrolled student. This classroom was off-limits to outsiders. Panicking, he hid himself just as the knob turned and Shima appeared. Hikaru's heart pounded.

Why? Why is Shima-sensei here?

Shima walked a few steps into the classroom

with an extremely tired look on his face. He sighed, put both hands down on a dusty desk and stared into space.

"That's not true. He loved you, too." Amamiya's words echoed in Hikaru's head.

At that moment, his cell phone rang. It was from Tsukasa. What terrible timing!

Shima realized it wasn't his cell phone, and looked around the classroom, confused.

"Did someone leave behind their cell phone? They're supposed to turn them off during school...kids these days never follow the rules," he grumbled, as he searched for the source of the noise.

Hikaru fumbled to turn his phone off, but Shima was coming near him. He was hidden behind a bunch of rolled-up maps in the back of the classroom. Shima happened to peek behind that spot, and their eyes met. Shima gasped, unable to move. Dead silence fell in the room.

At last, Hikaru regained his composure and grabbed Shima's arm. He pulled Shima towards him with all his might. They fell to the floor. The person he loved so much, whom he had made love to so many times, was in his arms.

"Let go, Umino," Shima uttered.

The lips he had kissed so many times were in front of his eyes.

"Sensei, did you sell your car?" Hikaru asked.

"What?" Shima asked back.

"Why?" Hikaru prompted.

Shima continued his clueless act. "Why what?"

"Why did you sell it?" Hikaru asked.

"Because I didn't use it," Shima finally answered.

"But you said you didn't just buy it to use for our dates!" Hikaru exclaimed.

Shima had said he bought it to make things easier for him. It was all lies.

"Umino, your girlfriend's waiting for you," Shima said quietly.

"Don't change the subject!" Hikaru cried out.

It was no use trying to run away now.

"I'm not." Shima sounded tired.

"How did you know I have a girlfriend?" Hikaru asked.

"I met her in the hallway," Shima told him. "You go to the same school? You make a good couple."

She was a gorgeous girl. That would usually be a compliment, but coming from Shima, it deeply hurt Hikaru.

"We're not going out," Hikaru denied flatly. "She just says that."

"Don't be mean, Umino," Shima chided. "I didn't know you were so cold."

"Who's the cold one?" Hikaru retorted. "You're the one who's being cold, Sensei. You changed your number right after I graduated."

That's right. There was no way Shima loved Hikaru if he treated him like this.

"I don't love her," Hikaru continued. "I don't hate her, but she's just using me. Once someone better comes along, she'll leave me, that's it."

"...But you are dating, right?" Shima wanted to know.

"If that makes you sleep better at night, Sensei." Hikaru struggled to stand up. "My love life sucks, anyway."

"Umino..."

Hikaru pulled up his sleeve, took off his watch and set it down on the desk. "I'm giving this back." He had treasured that watch.

"Goodbye, Sensei."

He had finally said the words he hadn't gotten a chance to say at his graduation. It had been too painful to say them then.

Everything had begun here, and now it ended here. It was appropriate. He didn't know why it started and ended just the same way. Everything was so painful, he couldn't stand it anymore.

"Where have you been?" Tsukasa said, smiling. She was surrounded by Hikaru's friends.

"You look like you're having a great time, Tsukasa," Hikaru said coldly.

"What?" She looked bewildered.

"Screw around with whoever you want," Hikaru snapped. "I'm going home."

"Hikaru-kun?!" Tsukasa exclaimed.

"Hikaru, what's wrong with you?" Hikaru's friend asked.

Hikaru ignored him and concentrated on the girl.

"Tsukasa, why don't we just break up so you can move on to someone better than me?"

The guys around them backed off as Hikaru said this.

"Why would I do that?" Tsukasa asked. "I love you! I'm going out with you!"

Hikaru felt bad about doing it in front of everyone, but he couldn't help it. No one could stop him from leaving.

"Why are you being so mean, Hikaru-kun?" Tsukasa's face was screwed up like she was about to cry.

He didn't know what to say to her. But he knew she'd find someone else in no time. He knew that that was what everyone else was thinking, too.

He walked out of the school gate, and was about to call his mom to tell her he was coming home for dinner when he realized he didn't have his cell phone.

"Where did I drop it?" he muttered, searching his clothes.

He had it with him in the Social Studies room. What had happened after he'd turned it off after that call from Tsukasa?

"I must have dropped it there." When he'd pushed Shima down.

He sighed. He was such a fool. He had no choice but to turn back.

He went in the back way so he wouldn't see anyone he knew. He took a few steps into the room, and then froze. On the floor, with both hands covering his face, was Shima. Hikaru's watch was still on top of the desk. Hearing a noise, Shima quickly stood up. He looked at him, surprised. Hikaru saw that his eyes were wet.

"Wh-what are you doing, Sensei?" Hikaru stammered.

"Wh-what about you?" Shima asked, obviously unnerved.

"I forgot something, so I came back to get it," Hikaru admitted.

"...Oh. I'm sorry, I didn't notice."

Shima was so kind, as usual. He had nothing to apologize about. Why was he so nice?

"What did you forget?" he asked as he started looking around on the floor.

"My cell phone," Hikaru said.

"Cell phone? Oh." Shima saw a glint of metal on the floor next to the rolled-up maps. He leaned over and picked it up, then went to hand it to Hikaru.

"Th-thank you." Hikaru stretched out his hand to take the cell phone.

Hikaru's hand. It seemed so nostalgic. After he set the cell phone in Hikaru's hand, Shima kept his hand on top of it.

"Sensei?"

"I'm sorry I deceived you." Shima squeezed Hikaru's hand.

"What do you mean?" Hikaru squeezed back.

"You used Amamiya's name to call me here that day, but I knew it was you," Shima admitted softly. "When you handed me the message, I had just seen Amamiya."

"...So you knew I was lying but came anyway?" Hikaru asked.

"I thought I would let you confess your feelings

to me," Shima said.

Hikaru was dumbstruck.

"Sensei?"

"While you were having sex with me, I was holding you back," Shima said.

I had acted like the victim, but I was really the assailant.

"Why...?" Hikaru couldn't believe all this.

"Why what?" Shima prompted.

"Were you in love with me, Sensei?" Hikaru asked.

Shima stared at Hikaru.

"Yes."

Hikaru swallowed hard. He squeezed Shima's hand harder. "Since when?"

How long had Shima loved him?

"I don't know," Shima confessed softly.

The comfortable feeling Shima had felt for Hikaru had, without him knowing it, developed into something else in his heart. Before he had realized it, he was always searching for Hikaru. He was fond of all of his students, but Hikaru was different. Hikaru had longed for him so innocently; Shima found himself wanting to be closer to Hikaru. He wanted Hikaru to love him more than his other teachers. By the time Shima realized it was love, it was no use—he wanted Hikaru so much it was driving him crazy.

But Shima, who was in a position of authority, couldn't make the first move, so he had let himself be raped. He had silently flirted with Hikaru until Hikaru felt driven into a corner, until he was at his wit's end,

until he couldn't handle it anymore. And finally, Shima's wish had been granted.

"That day, I wanted it to happen," Shima whispered. "And I thought it would end there, but..."

I was filled with such evil desires I thought I couldn't hope for anything more. But I couldn't stop.

"I thought you'd distance yourself from me after I said such terrible things to you here, but you instead came closer and closer. I was trying to give up on you, but you kept coming to look at my apartment every day."

"Okay. So you liked it, and that's why you let me in that day with the pizza?" Hikaru asked.

He hadn't realized it at the time, but there was no way someone would let their rapist into their apartment. He should have realized that much sooner.

"So," Hikaru muttered as things became clearer, "in other words, you were using Amamiya-sensei to make me jealous?"

"In a way, yes," Shima confessed.

When Hikaru came to look at Shima's apartment every day, Shima had wanted to keep him at a distance. But he felt that Hikaru was waiting for something, and he knew Hikaru wouldn't turn down an invitation to come inside. He hadn't known what to do, so he called Amamiya. He thought that if Hikaru saw Amamiya coming over, he'd finally give up on him. Or maybe he wanted Hikaru to see Amamiya to spur on his jealousy.

It might just be an excuse now, but Shima never intended to use Amamiya as a stalking horse.

"Then why?" Hikaru asked. "If you loved me,

why didn't you say so, Sensei?"

He loves you, too.

And why did they have to break up?

"Because I'm still a teacher," Shima explained.

"I should have drawn the line."

"So that's why you couldn't tell me you loved me?" Hikaru demanded.

"I let my lust control me and I got mixed up with you," Shima said. "No matter how unethical it was, I didn't want to lose the time I had with you. I enjoyed it. I was so happy. So I thought I should at least let it end as a game of make-believe, to atone for what I did."

"Atonement for what?" Hikaru exclaimed.

"That doesn't make me happy at all!"

"Atonement for your future," Shima whispered.

"My future?" Hikaru echoed.

What did that mean?

"I realized that you really loved me," Shima said. "Then I thought, 'What happens when you don't love me anymore?' I wanted to give you an excuse if you wanted to end it."

He had been afraid that their relationship would become unwanted baggage when Hikaru was ready for a new relationship. So even if it had been a false excuse, he'd wanted Hikaru to think he hadn't been serious about him. He didn't want to hurt him. He didn't want to leave any lasting scars.

He'd been forcing himself to think something like, "Well, he didn't love me back, so I can just chalk it up as a youthful indiscretion."

"I wanted it to be something you could laugh

about one day," Shima continued.

Because isn't it kind of funny to think about having a one-sided love with another man?

He had just wanted to settle it that simply.

"But now you're saying stuff like your love life sucks..." Shima began to sob.

He had worked so hard to protect Hikaru's future, but when Hikaru had told him goodbye and returned the watch Shima had treasured so much, it felt like Hikaru was denying everything Shima had done so much to protect. It was so painful. He felt so conflicted he just couldn't leave the room.

"Sensei..."

Hikaru pulled Shima close, and Shima didn't resist. He buried his nose in Shima's hair. It smelled fresh.

"Umino..."

"Yes?"

"You were so worried about your atonement, but you never had to do anything like that in the first place," Shima said. "I'm the one who had to atone for what I did."

And that was why he had broken up with him. He believed he had to.

"Sensei."

But...

"Sensei."

Shima never wanted to escape from the arms that held him again. "I'm so sorry, Umino."

"It's okay," Hikaru whispered.

It really was.

"Sensei, give me an extension on playing lovers with you." Hikaru squeezed Shima tightly. "I don't care if it's just for pretend, but go out with me until I graduate college, Sensei."

Shima really does love me!

"I'm bad at long-distance relationships," Shima replied.

"It's not that far," Hikaru pointed out. "Only an hour and a half by train."

Maybe he loves me even more than I love him.

"I shouldn't have sold my car..." Shima muttered.

"It's okay," Hikaru assured him. "This time I'll buy one."

Sensei.

"What?" Shima looked at Hikaru.

"I'm not in high school anymore, Sensei," said Hikaru. "I have a driver's license now."

"Really? I guess you're right..." Shima whispered.

You're not in high school anymore.

"Come on, give me an extension," Hikaru urged.

"On one condition," Shima said, starting to smile.

"If either of us have a change of heart before the time limit's up, it's over, right?" Hikaru finished for him.

"How did you know?" Shima smiled.

"I love you, Sensei."

"Me too, Hikaru."

They kissed each other deeply and fell onto the floor. Hikaru's brain felt like it was going numb from the rush of their first kiss after such a long time.

"Sensei...Sensei, say it again," Hikaru said between kisses.

"Hmm?"

"You just called me 'Hikaru.'"

"Oh..." Shima had always called him that in his mind, but it had slipped out.

"Sensei, call me Hikaru again," Hikaru said, holding Shima's warm body against his.

"...Hikaru."

At the sweet sound of Shima's voice whispering his name, Hikaru held him close against his chest.



Passion

Valentine Special

"When he loves, he loves completely."

"Ughh...it's really cold. That's February for you." Amamiya entered the staff room after school wearing a sweat suit, and flashed a broad smile at Shima. "Oh, you're still here, Shima?"

"Just about to leave," Shima replied.

"Hey, Shima, wanna go eat hot pot together?!" Amamiya offered. "C'mon, let's go!"

"Just the two of us?" Shima asked meaningfully.

"There's nothing wrong with two guys going out to eat together once in a while!" Amamiya said, pouting to hide his embarrassment.

"But won't your girlfriend be mad if she finds out you're going out alone with your ex?" Shima teased.

"Nooo!" Amamiya declared. "She always understands me. To a frightening degree."

"Wow, she can even make you afraid of her?" Shima said, laughing. "It's been a long time since I had hot pot."

"See? See? Let's go!" Amamiya urged childishly.

"Ah, that was good!" Shima said, and rubbed his hands together, satisfied. "Hot pot is so great...it warms you from the inside out!"

The inside of the restaurant was warm too, filled with steam.

"Now for the coup de grâce! Rice gruel!" Amamiya said, even though he had eaten way too much already. He was totally in hot pot mode, and slurped down the broth left in the pot.

"You're gonna make a great husband, Amamiya," Shima said teasingly. He looked at the clock on the wall. It was almost ten o'clock at night. He glanced at the cell phone in his pocket, not knowing what he should do.

"Um, Amamiya."

"It's done! Eat up!" Amamiya thrust a small bowl filled with rice gruel in front of Shima.

Shima was just about to reluctantly start eating when his cell phone went off. It was Hikaru.

"Sorry," Shima said, and quickly stood up.

"Take your time," Amamiya said, slightly annoyed. But he watched Shima walk away with a grin on his face.

Hikaru called Shima every night at ten o'clock. He used his break during work to call Shima, and although they couldn't talk for very long, it was essential time together for both of them. Shima didn't want to disturb anyone in the restaurant with his phone call, so he prepared himself against the cold and went outside.

The breath that he exhaled was pure white.

Finally he pressed the call button. "Hello?"

"Ah, Sensei?" Hikaru greeted. "Is it cold there, too? It's sooo cold here."

"The wind stings a lot," Shima replied. "It looks like it's gonna snow, too."

Hikaru immediately went into worry mode. "Are you outside?"

Why? Shouldn't he be in his apartment?

"Amamiya invited me out to eat hot pot," Shima said.

"Amamiya-sensei? Hmmm. You two aren't alone, are you?" Hikaru couldn't hide the instant jealousy in his voice.

Shima laughed. "You don't have anything to worry about. How's it going at work?"

"Um, about that..." Hikaru hesitated. "I'm really sorry, but my boss said I can't have Valentine's Day off."

"That's what I thought," Shima said with a sigh. "It'll probably be really busy at the café that night."

"I begged him to let me off," Hikaru said, "but we're short-staffed so he said no way."

"Well, there's nothing we can do about it," Shima said. "But didn't he say he was gonna give you a raise soon?"

Hikaru's voice perked up immediately. "Yeah, because I've been working so hard, he said."

"So you can't complain, then," Shima pointed out. "You're saving up for a car and everything."

"Yeah..." Hikaru sighed. "I'm really sorry we

can't spend Valentine's Day together though, Sensei."

"If it wasn't on a weekday this year, I would've come to see you, though..." Shima said.

"Whaaaaat?!" Hikaru squawked.

"Why are you so surprised?" Shima asked, amused.

"B-b-because," Hikaru stammered. "I thought my heart was gonna stop beating!"

"You're so weird, Hikaru," Shima remarked.

"I'm sorry," Hikaru said. "But just hearing that makes me happy. Thanks, Sensei."

"Hikaru, isn't your break over now?" Shima reminded him.

"Um, oh, crap!" Hikaru exclaimed. "Bye, Sensei, I'll call you later!"

"Don't work too hard, okay?" Shima said.

"Okay," Hikaru replied. "Don't go home too late, Sensei."

"I know," Shima said.

"Bye," Hikaru whispered.

"Bye." Shima hung up the phone, blushing a bit at Hikaru's jealousy.

He returned to the restaurant feeling a little disappointed that they wouldn't be able to see each other on Valentine's Day.

It was against the rules to bring chocolate to school on Valentine's Day. However, every year that rule was broken and the students brought some anyway. The female students always brought a lot of chocolate



for the teachers.

"I say this every year, Shima-sensei, but what are you going to do with all that chocolate?" Morikawa asked.

"What does Amamiya usually do with his?" Shima inquired.

The two of them were chatting as they walked down the hallway.

"Usually?" She gave a dazzling smile and said, "I'm not sure about what he usually does with them, but this year I think he's donating them to a daycare."

"That's a really good idea. Can you give him these, too?" Shima held out a paper bag, when suddenly two girls ran from the opposite end of the hallway towards them.

"Shima-sensei! Thank goodness you haven't gone home yet!" They both looked up at him with bright eyes, panting.

Morikawa smiled at the girls, bowed slightly to Shima and then left.

"Wow, you got a lot more chocolate than I thought you would!" One of them peeked into the bag Shima was holding. "But please accept mine, too, Sensei!"

"Uh, th-thanks," Shima stuttered.

"C'mon, Michiru, you too!" She nudged the other girl, and continued, "Don't be so nervous, just give it to him!"

But Michiru seemed troubled by the amount of chocolates in Shima's bag. He had so many people that liked him, so why should she matter?

Hey, listen, Sensei," the first girl said. "She's been nervous the whole day about giving you chocolate!"

Now that she mentioned it, Michiru looked really pale.

"I'm not really that special, you know..." Shima said jokingly.

All of a sudden Michiru clapped her hand over her mouth and fell down to the floor.

"Ahh!" her friend screamed. "Michiru! What's wrong?"

Hearing the girl's screams, Morikawa came running back down the hall.

"She's so pale!" Morikawa cried. She bent down and properly laid Michiru down on the floor and undid the hook on her skirt. "Shima-sensei, please turn your back." She unbuttoned Michiru's school uniform, placed a hand inside of her blouse and said, "I can't believe students these days!" She paused a bit and then said, "This could be serious. Shima-sensei, will you please call an ambulance?"

He nodded and quickly dialed 911 on his cell phone.

The café Hikaru worked at was very busy on the night of Valentine's Day. They offered not only tea, but also other delicious café food, so it was a popular spot for both women and couples. That night they sold a lot of chocolate cakes and other types of chocolate.

"This whole place is filled with chocolate, it's

kind of impressive," Hikaru commented.

But it felt empty somehow. If only Shima were with him, they could eat chocolate cake together, and he could give Shima a present of chocolate, too. But he couldn't possibly ask Shima to come see him, so he had decided if he got off work early, he'd bring the chocolate over to Shima's place.

"Come on, Hikaru, get to work!" his boss said in a strict voice.

"Sorry!" He took a deep breath and headed back out onto the floor of the restaurant. He might not be able to make his usual ten o'clock call, which made him even sadder.

By the time Michiru's condition finally settled down, it was around eight o'clock. Shima and Morikawa had accompanied her in the ambulance and waited out in the hallway as the doctor examined her.

"I'm sure she'd been pale like that all day. She was wearing a school uniform one size smaller than hers! It was so tight that it actually restricted her body's oxygen supply!" Morikawa exclaimed.

"Why would anyone do that?" Shima asked.

"Well, isn't it obvious?" Morikawa looked up at Shima and smiled. "She's a young girl, Shima-sensei."

Today was Valentine's Day, a day of battle for young girls. They wanted to appear as cute and slender as possible when they gave their crushes their chocolates.

"Oh, because of that, huh?" Shima nodded

absentmindedly. He figured it must be hard for girls who felt pressured to lose weight or appear thinner to look good for their crush.

"But I'm glad we were there," Morikawa said with a sigh of a relief. "Michiru Yoshinaga is an only child and her father is a single parent, and when we called him at work he said he wouldn't be able to leave yet."

"Really? Poor Michiru..." Shima murmured.

"Watanabe-sensei is Michiru's homeroom teacher," Morikawa continued, "but he's home, sick with the flu. We called him to tell him about her, and his wife had to stop him from coming here! She said, 'You'll cause even more trouble spreading your germs around in a hospital!'"

Shima laughed.

"I'll stay with her, Shima-sensei, so why don't you go home?" Morikawa offered.

"Shouldn't you be going home, Morikawa?" Shima countered. "Amamiya will be lonely."

Morikawa laughed. "He knows I'm here at the hospital, so I don't think he'll be pouting."

"Is he coming here after his club activities are over?" Shima asked.

"He didn't say so, but that's probably what he'll do," Morikawa guessed.

"Don't say it like it's such a bad thing!" He laughed.

"Aren't you hungry, Shima-sensei?" Morikawa inquired. "It's already eight o'clock."

"Not really." In all the commotion, he hadn't

though about food. He wasn't the kind of person who ate very much, anyway. Sometimes he'd only have one meal a day. "Anyway, I don't have any plans tonight, and my apartment isn't that far away. I'll wait here until Michiru's dad gets here, so you can go, Morikawa-sensei."

"Really? Okay, then," she finally relented. "But I can't believe you don't have plans for Valentine's Day!"

"Really?" Shima asked.

"What if someone's waiting by your apartment door right now?" Morikawa surmised.

"Then that would be kinda scary," Shima said bluntly.

Morikawa laughed. "I guess you're right. Like a stalker."

Shima looked at the bag of chocolates. He was thankful for all the chocolates, but it was getting kind of heavy. He held the bag out to Morikawa. "Morikawa-sensei, if Amamiya is really donating his chocolate, could you give him these, too?"

"That's fine," Morikawa said. "Are you sure there aren't any letters in there?"

"I'm sure." He had accepted the chocolates, but turned down any letters he was offered.

"Okay. Well, then, I'll take these chocolates for you," Morikawa said, accepting the bag.

"Thanks a lot," Shima said with feeling.

"I only wish Amamiya was as grateful as you, Shima-sensei." She giggled, and left with the paper bag in hand.

Shima had thought he might be able to leave around ten o'clock, but it was already past nine-thirty, and Michiru's father still hadn't arrived.

"I'm sorry, Sensei," Michiru said pitifully from the hospital bed as she saw Shima check his watch again.

"For what?" Shima asked softly.

"Because today's Valentine's Day...didn't you have plans with your girlfriend?" Michiru asked.

"Not today," Shima replied.

"Not *today*?" Michiru echoed. She hid the pain she felt in her chest with a laugh.

So I guess Shima-sensei does have a girlfriend. Well, of course he does. He's so cute, why wouldn't he?

"You don't have to worry about it," Shima said. "I'll stay here until your father comes, so just get some rest."

It was true he didn't have any formal plans, but it was also true that he was worried about the time. Her father still hadn't shown up. But he couldn't leave his student in the hospital room by herself in the state she was in. He had turned his cell phone off since entering the hospital. If Hikaru called him as he usually did at ten o'clock, he wondered if Hikaru would leave him a voice mail. And if he listened to it and wasn't satisfied with just a message, no matter what time it was, he wanted to call Hikaru back. He tried not to think badly about Michiru's father who wouldn't show up. Time passed quietly on the night of Valentine's Day.

"Hikaru, why don't you head home now? Here you go," his boss said, handing him a box of chocolate cake.

"But there's still an hour until closing time!" Hikaru protested.

Although it was true that the restaurant was only about half-full.

"It doesn't look like any more customers will come at this hour," his boss reasoned out.

Today was Valentine's Day. What couple would want to spend the entire night sitting at a café?

"Take that, okay?" his boss said, motioning towards the chocolate cake.

"Are you sure..." Hikaru hesitated.

"It's a little misshapen, so we can't sell it," his boss answered. "So you can take it home."

"Really? Thank you!" Hikaru said happily.

"See you tomorrow," his boss said.

"See you tomorrow!" Hikaru called out.

Hikaru couldn't change out of his uniform fast enough. He dashed to the train station with the box in hand. He called Shima on his cell phone while he waited for the train to come, but there was no answer. Then he called his apartment. There was no answer there, either.

"Sensei...?"

What was Shima doing? Since Hikaru had said he couldn't be with him tonight, had Shima gone out with someone else? Who was he with?! Could it be...Amamiya-sensei?

No, of course not. Shima had told him that Amamiya was dating the school nurse and was planning to marry her! But he figured Amamiya might say that those were two different matters. He furrowed his brow.

"Well, I'll just go to Sensei's apartment. Maybe he'll be home by then. Yeah, that's what I'll do," he encouraged himself.

He hurriedly boarded the train that slid into the station, fidgeting during the whole ride.

He kept calling Shima's cell phone and apartment, but there was still no answer. Finally, he reached Shima's apartment. He didn't see any lights on, and when he rang the doorbell, there was no answer.

"Wow, he really isn't home!" he exclaimed.

Where had Shima gone? It was already past ten o'clock! Hikaru's heart began pounding, and he started to worry.

He stared at his cell phone and yelled, "I can't take it anymore!" and dialed Amamiya's number.

Hikaru had entered Shima's new cell phone number in the "Significant Other" group, of course. When Shima had given him the new number, he had said, "Do you remember the first time I gave you my cell phone number?"

"Yeah, I remember," Hikaru had answered.

"You told me you might call me multiple times a day, remember?" Shima had said.

"Yeah," Hikaru had answered with a nod.

"But I don't think you ever called me more than

once a day," Shima had said with a pout.

"Sensei?" Hikaru had gaped at him. What did that mean? "Well, I didn't want to bother you," he had hastily replied, "so I tried my best to restrain myself from calling you a lot."

"I know," Shima had said with a smile. "But it wouldn't bother me now."

"Sensei...?"

"You don't have to hold back anymore," Shima had said, his pretty face tilted down slightly.

When the cultural festival was over, Shima had had to prepare for the bonfire, so they had parted. Hikaru was supposed to be on his way to his parents' house, but he had stopped instead into the staff room to talk to Amamiya.

"That's not true. He loved you, too."

Those words had been true. Hikaru had wanted to tell Amamiya that. Even though they had been rivals, Amamiya had gone out of his way to tell Hikaru the truth about Shima's feelings. He had wanted to apologize to his teacher for not believing him, and wanted to thank him as well.

"Ohh, you look like a new man!" Amamiya had said teasingly before Hikaru had had a chance to tell him anything. "Well, details aside, are you guys a couple again now?"

Hikaru had blushed but answered immediately. "Yeah."

"So I was right, huh?" Amamiya had said,

bragging. "I *am* his ex, after all."

"Um, about that..." Hikaru had wanted to know how long they had dated, and what their relationship had been like. He wanted to ask him, but...

"What, Umino?" Amamiya had prompted.

"Um, nothing."

Hikaru had shaken his head. He couldn't ask something so straightforward.

"When he loves, he loves completely," Amamiya had said.

"What?" Hikaru had asked, thrown off balance by the unexpected words.

"Shima," Amamiya had clarified. "When he loves someone, he does it completely. He changes himself to suit his lover. That's just the kind of person he is."

"Loving someone completely?" Hikaru had murmured.

Now that Amamiya had mentioned it, it was true. Hikaru could think of a lot of examples. The car, the phone. And even the game of pretend lovers. Everything Shima had ever said or done, he had done it for Hikaru's sake.

"What are you grinning about?" Amamiya had said, and then had made a strange face. "But that was a burden to me. Changing everything to suit me."

"Is that why you broke up?" Hikaru had inquired.

"Yeah."

But Amamiya had smiled. If that type of love made Hikaru happy instead of it being burdensome, their

love would last a long time.

"I'm a little jealous of you."

"What?" Hikaru had asked.

"Nothing." Amamiya had really been envious of Hikaru. "Well, if you ever have any problems with Shima, don't hesitate to ask his ex, okay!"

"What? Ah!" Amamiya had grabbed his cell phone and entered his own number in it. "Let me have your number, too." After he had entered Hikaru's own number in his cell phone, he had pressed the call button.

"Se-sensei!" Hikaru had protested.

"Now I know your number, too." Amamiya had quickly given him back the cell phone, and Hikaru had been unable to suppress a smile.

"Take care of Shima."

Again Hikaru had been surprised.

"What?"

Amamiya's face had looked so serious when he said, "No matter how old he is, he'll only be able to have pure love. Don't make him cry."

"I won't," Hikaru had promised.

"Good boy," Amamiya had said, patting Hikaru on the head.

Amamiya answered his cell phone right away. "Oh, Umino! What are you doing letting Shima be alone today!" he said angrily.

"Um, is Shima-sensei with you?" Hikaru asked hesitantly.

"Of course not!" Amamiya yelled. "Isn't he at home?"

"What? No, he's not," Hikaru quickly denied.

"Huh? Are you at his apartment right now?" Amamiya inquired.

"He's not home and he won't answer his cell phone." Hikaru was sure Amamiya knew how embarrassed he was to be calling him.

Amamiya laughed and said, "Don't tell me he's at the hospital still?"

"The hospital?" Hikaru echoed. "Is something wrong with him?"

"No, he went there with a student," Amamiya told him.

"Oh."

Good. Well, not good, but at least it wasn't Sensei who needed to go there.

Amamiya told him where the hospital was, and luckily it was nearby.

"Thank you!" Hikaru said quickly.

He headed towards the hospital. He rushed down the apartment's stairs and started to run when he smacked right into someone.

"I'm sorry!" he apologized and then said, "Sensei?"

Shima was looking up at Hikaru with a surprised look on his face. "What are you doing here, Hikaru?" He was so surprised he didn't know what to say.

"Um, because..." Hikaru trailed off.

"Because why?" Shima chuckled, and put an arm around his neck.

"Sensei?"

"What if someone's waiting by your apartment door right now?"

"Wow, I can't believe you really came!" Shima exclaimed.

"Sensei..."

Shima was usually so cautious, but tonight he gave Hikaru a kiss outside, where people might see.

Hikaru was so surprised he dropped the box containing the cake. "Oh, crap!" he murmured, but Shima kissed him again. He didn't care about cakes or chocolates.

"Thanks, Hikaru. I wanted to see you so badly."

Hearing Shima's confession, Hikaru hugged him tightly.

"Ah, I knew it! It's ruined!" Hikaru said, bringing the opened box of cake to the bed, after they had finished making love. "It's because I dropped it. I'm sorry, Sensei," he apologized.

"Who cares what it looks like?" Shima said blithely, and picked up a piece of the cake with his hands and tasted it. "This is really good, Hikaru!"

He held some up to Hikaru's mouth.

"It is delicious!" Hikaru agreed. But Hikaru didn't taste the cake; he tasted Shima's lips instead. "I've never tasted anything so delicious!"

"Really?" Shima smiled and brought his lips closer to Hikaru's again.

"Sensei." Hikaru shoved the box to the corner of

the bed and embraced Shima.

"Sensei..."

He stroked Shima's soft hair and held him close to his chest.

"Sensei, will you be my lover forever?"

Even though he'd graduate from college, he didn't want to graduate from Shima. "After college, I'll find a job nearby. Then let's move in together."

"You don't know what might happen in the future," Shima said reasonably.

Hikaru had just started college, and he had no idea what might happen in the next three years.

"That's not what I mean, Sensei," Hikaru protested.

"What then?" Shima asked.

"I just proposed to you," Hikaru declared. "I wanted to tell you that after I graduate from college, I want to be together with you no matter what happens."

"Hikaru..." Shima murmured.

"You don't have to promise me anything," Hikaru hastily said, "but I want to live with you, Sensei. Do you feel the same way?"

"...I do," Shima finally answered. "I want to live with you, too."

He didn't know what might happen afterwards. But, if it was possible, he wanted to have a future with Hikaru.

"And also!" Hikaru exclaimed. "I want to change the plan a little."

"What plan?" Shima asked.

"I want to buy something else before I buy a

car," Hikaru announced.

"Don't tell me you're going to buy an apartment for us already?" Shima said, smiling.

Hikaru smiled, too.

"That's not what I was gonna say," Hikaru said, knowing it was too early for that. "But it's kind of close."

If he could only buy *that thing* for Shima, no matter what day it was, he would bring it to him right away.

"Aren't you going to tell me what it is, Hikaru?" Shima asked.

"Not yet," Hikaru answered.

"I have no idea what you're talking about..." Shima said. "I'm a little scared."

Hikaru just grinned.

Then, he'd ask Shima a second time:

"Sensei, will you marry me?"

He didn't care if Shima turned him down again:

"Like I could do that, idiot!"

"What are you grinning at, Hikaru? You're so weird!" Shima cried out.

Hikaru loved him so much. He loved him so much he didn't know how he could express it.

"When he loves, he loves completely."

And I love him completely, too.



Afterword

Good afternoon. My name is Shinobu Gotoh. It's been four and a half years since my last Chara Paperbacks book, "Sleeping Moon in Water."

The novel adaptation of "Passion" was announced around the time the second volume of the manga came out, and now it's finally completed. For a while there I was worried if it would really come out or not. (laugh) What did you think of the novel version of "Passion?" Did you enjoy it?

There are a lot of differences between this and the original manga. I felt that since I was writing a novel version, I might as well put some new ideas into it as well. In the past, when I did adaptations of original work, they turn out sounding like little more than a script of the original with the exact same plot and dialogue, but this time, I was aiming for a definite "novel feel" to the story.

I tried to write the story as directly as possible in order to convey the characters' feelings and the scenery. I'm relieved it turned out as close as a real novel as possible, but at the very beginning of the process I wasn't sure how I would achieve that. I had a lot of doubts like that at first.

I began work with the original "Passion" when it was handed to the editing department about three years

ago. So my relationship with "Passion" is fairly long, and I had a relative idea of where I wanted to go with the plot and the setting. At first the plans were not to do a novel, but another comic book, so I had to keep editing and editing, when finally they extended the length to be a novel. But then I had to change the story in order to suit a novel. I felt I had to be faithful to the original, and it is more or less the same story. With the extra story, I had a lot of length restrictions, so again I had to keep cutting it and cutting it.

But even the original plot was four volumes, so I worried about what to do. I wasn't able to fit in the scene with Hikaru and Amamiya in the main plot of the book, so I added it in during the bonus story at the end. I wanted to make sure everyone knew that unbeknownst to Shima, his ex-boyfriend and his current boyfriend were having that conversation! What did you think of it?

After I finished my re-write and I wrote comments for the comic book, I realized again just how much work Takaku-san puts into her illustrations. I'm blessed to have her working with me, because she helped expand the world of my characters so much. Thank you so much.

Because of her, Shima and Hikaru have become even more precious to me. And not just because of their looks! (laugh) Because of her, I feel closer to them and fonder of them.

Since the second volume of the comic book was so long, there wasn't enough room for her to do original illustrations in the back like there had been in the first volume. But I hope she can do more in the future!

I'd like to thank my advisors for helping out, always working hard. This story was possible because of many people's hard work and support.

I don't know if the novel version of Shima and Hikaru seem to be the same as the manga version, but I would love to hear any comments about it. I hope that next year, in 2004, I can continue the story of "Passion" and work with Takaku-san once again. I don't know any details about when the next part of the story will be published, but I can tell you I will do my best. Please look forward to it.

— Shinobu Gotoh